AFTER THE TSUNAMI

PETER BEINART, JOSHUA KURLANTZICK, DANIEL SAREWITZ and ROGER A. PIELKE JR., LEON WIESELTIER

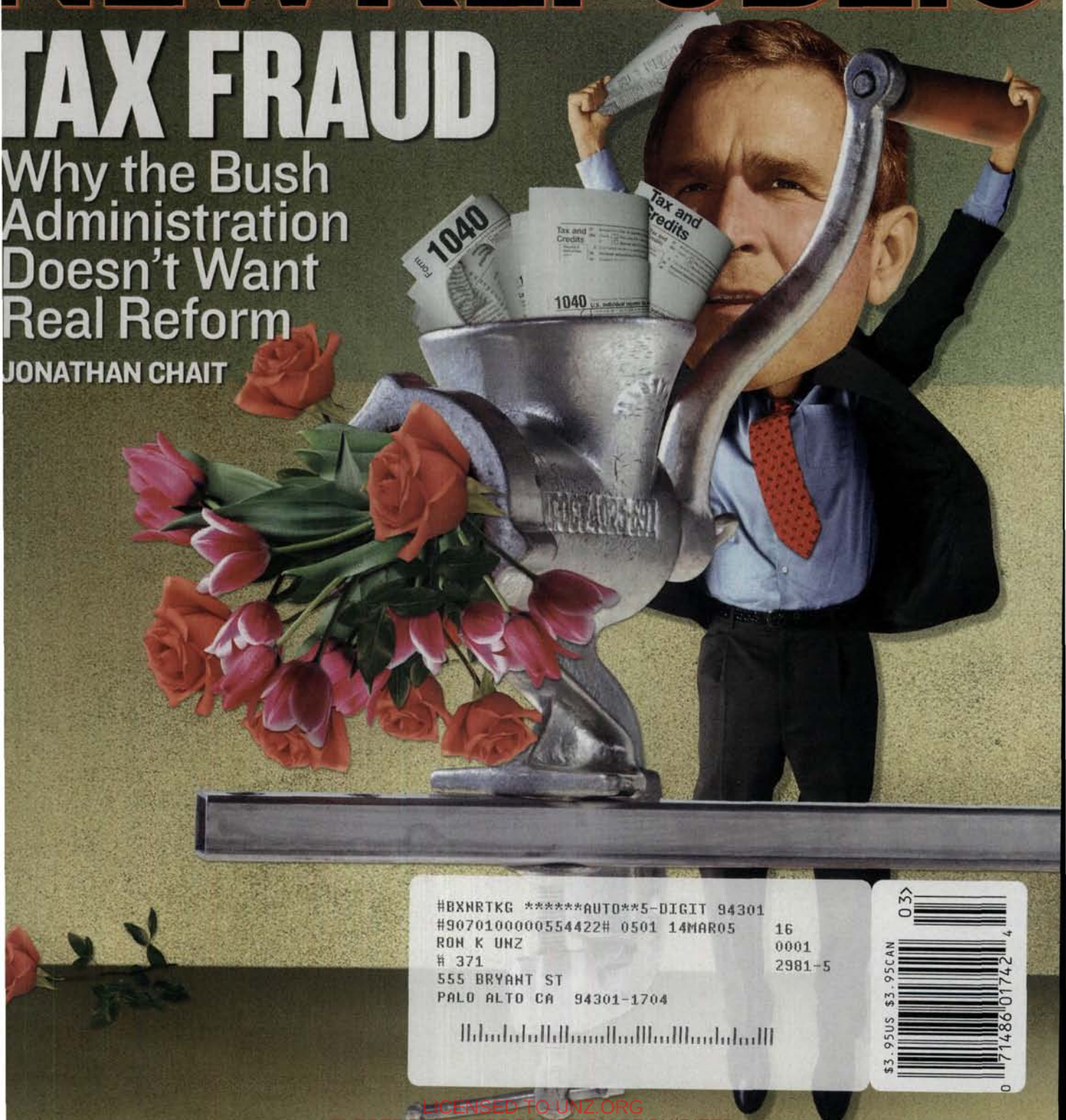
THE NEW REPUBLIC

WWW.TNR.COM ▶ JANUARY 17, 2005

TAX FRAUD

Why the Bush Administration Doesn't Want Real Reform

JONATHAN CHAIT

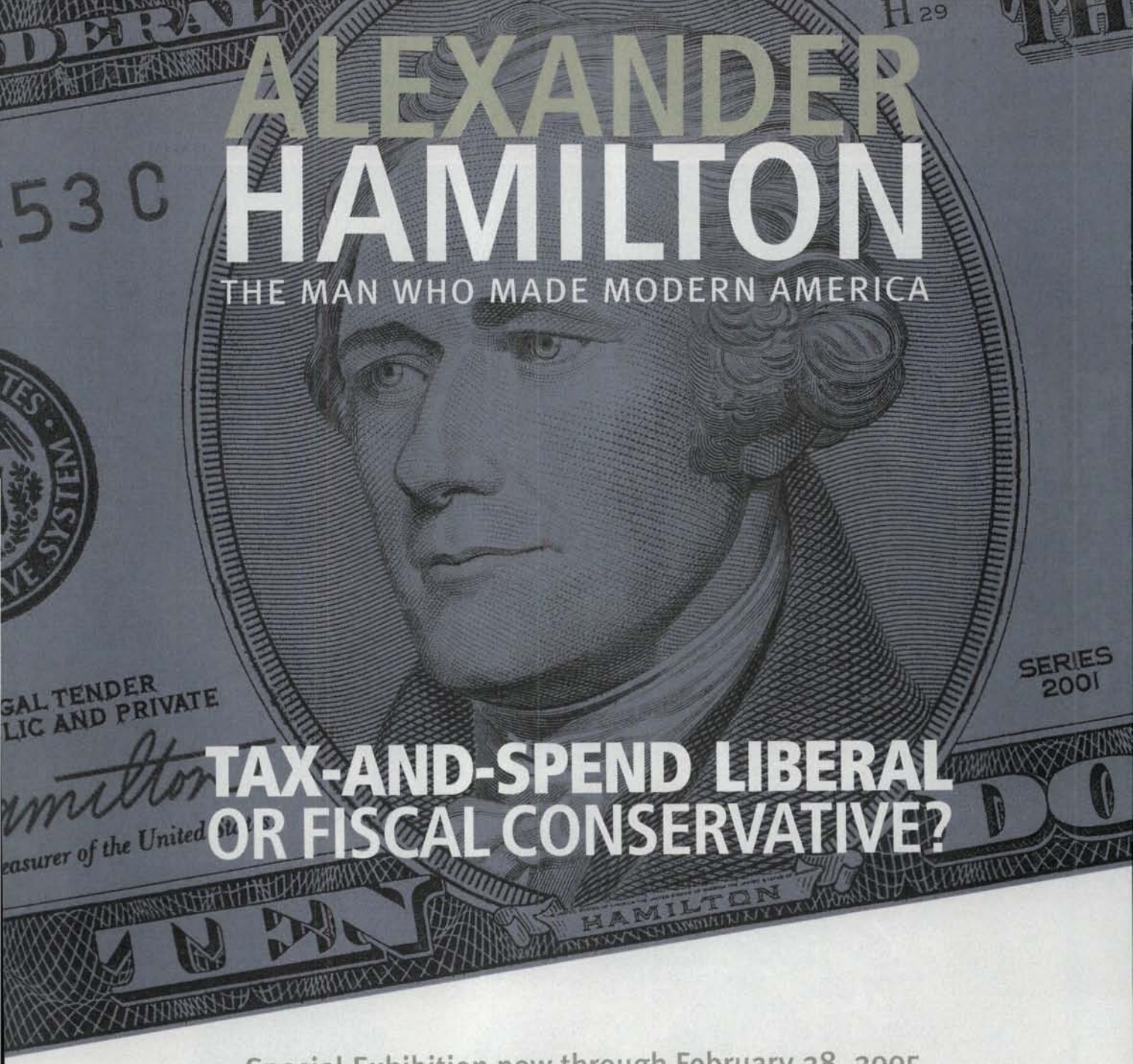


#BXNRTKG ******AUTO**5-DIGIT 94301
#9070100000554422# 0501 14MAR05
RON K UNZ
371
555 BRYANT ST
PALO ALTO CA 94301-1704

16
0001
2981-5

03>
$3.95US $3.95CAN
0 71486 01742 4

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Special Exhibition now through February 28, 2005

With deep appreciation to our corporate sponsors: BEAR STEARNS, Commerce Bank, Bloomberg

Programs at the New-York Historical Society are made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency.

New-York Historical Society | Making History for 200 Years

Central Park West at 77th Street 212-873-3400 www.AlexanderHamiltonExhibition.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
MARTIN PERETZ

EDITOR Peter Beinart
LITERARY EDITOR Leon Wieseltier
EXECUTIVE EDITOR J. Peter Scoblic
MANAGING EDITOR Jeremy Kahn
FOREIGN EDITOR Joshua Kurlantzick
SENIOR EDITORS
Jonathan Chait, Jonathan Cohn, Michelle Cottle, Michael Crowley, Gregg Easterbrook, Franklin Foer, Ruth Franklin, John B. Judis, Lawrence F. Kaplan, Ryan Lizza, Noam Scheiber, Andrew Sullivan, James Wood, Jason Zengerle
LEGAL AFFAIRS Jeffrey Rosen
ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR
Adam B. Kushner
TNR ONLINE
Richard Just, Editor
Christiane Culhane, Culture Editor
FILMS Stanley Kauffmann
THEATER Robert Brustein
ART Jed Perl
MUSIC David Hajdu
ARCHITECTURE Martin Filler
DANCE Jennifer Homans
TELEVISION Lee Siegel
POETRY EDITOR Glyn Maxwell
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Fouad Ajami, David A. Bell, Paul Berman, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Nathan Glazer, Anthony Grafton, David Grann, Robert Kagan, Michael Kinsley, Charles Krauthammer, Jeremy McCarter, John McWhorter, Sherwin B. Nuland, Christopher Orr, David Rieff, Maggie Scarf, Ronald Steel, Cass R. Sunstein, Alan Taylor, E.V. Thaw, Helen Vendler, Michael Walzer, Sean Wilentz, Alan Wolfe, Robert Wright
CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS
Jack Coughlin, David Cowles, Vint Lawrence, David Schorr
FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS
Massoud Ansari, Masha Gessen, Yossi Klein Halevi, Janine Zacharia
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Spencer Ackerman
ART/DESIGN DIRECTION
Joe Heroun, Christine Car/H2C Media
EDITORIAL-CORPORATE COORDINATOR
Laura E. Obolensky
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR AND INFORMATION-TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR
Bruce Steinke
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Henry Riggs
ASSISTANT EDITORS
Kara Baskin, Marisa Katz, Clay Risen
ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR
Alexander Barnes Dryer
ASSISTANT LITERARY EDITOR
Deborah Friedell
ASSISTANT POETRY EDITOR Melanie Rehak
REPORTER-RESEARCHERS
Telis Demos, Tom Frank, Keelin McDonell

PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER Stephanie Sandberg
GENERAL MANAGER Allen Chin
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Lori Fleishman Dorr
ONLINE BUSINESS DIRECTOR Ari Gersen
ONLINE MARKETING MANAGER Emilie Harkin

ADVERTISING SALES & MARKETING
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER Richard Parker
DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING, WEST
Joan Stapleton Tooley
ACCOUNT MANAGER Julie Sturmak
PUBLISHING REPRESENTATIVE
Perry Janoski, Allston-Cherry, Ltd.
MARKETING MANAGER Kate Genser
BUSINESS ASSISTANT Alexandra Scott

TNR/ON SYMPOSIA ON PUBLIC POLICY
Joan Daly

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION
ACCOUNTING MANAGER Debra Sotelo
ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT Vanessa Wilson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
ROGER HERTOG, Chairman
MARTIN PERETZ
MICHAEL STEINHARDT

NEW REPUBLIC
Updated daily. On the Web at www.tnr.com.

THE NEW REPUBLIC
A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND THE ARTS

JANUARY 17, 2005 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,696 VOLUME 232

COVER STORY

Jonathan Chait 17 **Bait And...** President Bush's proposed "tax reform" isn't tax reform at all. It's the opposite. Just look at who's behind it.

AFTER THE TSUNAMI

Peter Beinart 6 **TRB | Distant Shores** The tsunami and the isolationism of the post–September 11 right.

Daniel Sarewitz and Roger A. Pielke Jr. 10 **Rising Tide** Don't blame global warming for the tsunami.

Joshua Kurlantzick 12 **Bangkok Dispatch: After** The Thai people responded well to the tsunami. Their government did not.

Leon Wieseltier 34 **WASHINGTON DIARIST | The Wake**

POLITICS & THE WORLD

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** Recriminations about THE NEW REPUBLIC's recriminations issue, &c.

The Editors 7 **Labor Pains** Why the Bush administration's assault on the National Labor Relations Board matters.

8 **NOTEBOOK** Why *The Financial Times* loves Eliot Spitzer and *The Wall Street Journal* doesn't, &c.

Dan Ephron 13 **El Bireh Dispatch: Power Play** Will Mahmoud Abbas coopt Hamas or the other way around?

Norman J. Ornstein 15 **Unprepared** Terrorists' greatest opportunity wasn't the conventions or Election Day. It's the inauguration. And, if they strike, we're totally unprepared.

BOOKS & THE ARTS

Stanley Kauffmann 20 **FILMS | Flying and Fighting** DiCaprio's incompetence grounds *The Aviator*; *Million Dollar Baby* reeks of mothballs.

Christine Stansell 21 **What Stuff!** *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* by C.A. Tripp, edited by Lewis Gannett

Bill Coyle 22 **POEM** | *Aubade*

Wyatt Mason 26 **Swann's Ways** Everyone hates translations—especially the literalists for whom no rendering is ever faithful enough. But can a few superfluous phrases or tonal errors bring down an entire literary universe? What a new translation of Proust reveals about great literary style.

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY *Francisco Caceres*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

ALL FOR ONE

THE NEW REPUBLIC'S POST-election analysis left unsaid that not since the nineteenth century have small business owners and the self-employed comprised such a large proportion of the American electorate. Interestingly, the shift after the second debate from Iraq and terrorism to domestic issues did not help John Kerry, as many had expected. His proposals to create new insurance programs and to spend on Social Security to save it did not help. While a person's class may not affect her voting rigidly, it does influence her worldview. That's why the growing impact of self-employment and small-business activity among the electorate causes a shift away from voter attachment to the statist, collectivist programs (like unionism) that we associate with wage employment in large enterprises and toward the values of self-reliance. Increasing home ownership—our society boasts a larger percentage of homeowners than at any time in our history—supports this trend, because home ownership, too, reduces feelings of dependence on external forces and boosts those of self-reliance. Yet another supporting datum is the failure of Latinos to break as solidly as predicted for Kerry. Recent immigrants from Latin America come from societies where most people, though poor, are self-employed or unlicensed workers and, if urban, reside as squatters in self-constructed homes—and where government programs, though plentiful, are aimed not at the poor but at the politically well-connected. What's more, many Hispanic immigrants work in off-the-books, individualist occupations.

The New Deal's legacy is dying with the "greatest generation," to be replaced by individualist, antistatist ideals—precisely those that Republicans have made their own. Therefore, the Democrats' ability to remain competitive in future elections hinges on their abandonment of liberal statism as an answer to middle-class woes. This need not mean a retreat tout court from the state and all its works; the electorate continues to favor regulation, especially of corporations, to protect the environment, reduce the cost of health care, and solve other social problems. The

Democrats' task is to articulate a vision of government that does not depend on heavy spending or massive entitlement programs. Bill Clinton understood this—though not until after a first-term medical insurance debacle. Now, more than ever, the party must cease depending on liberal-statists for its ideas and climb aboard the individualist bus. We may not like all of the places it stops, but it's the only ride available.

DAVID G. BECKER
Associate Professor of Government
Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire

POLITICS BY OTHER MEANS

THE MOST NOTEWORTHY ASPECT OF Brad Carson's essay is its title ("Vote Righteously!" November 22, 2004). Clearly, the line between commentary on moral issues and political advocacy has been crossed by religious organizations (and not only by right-leaning ones); there is no possibility of crossing back. These organizations surely have the right to advocate what they wish. They just as surely have the right to moral incoherence in their advocacy. They have no right, however, to a tax deduction. And, since an investigation of every one of this country's religious institutions is absurdly impractical, the only recourse for restoring a modicum of honesty (honor is far too high a goal) to U.S. political discourse is the taxation of all religious property and advocacy.

BERNARD FREYDBERG
Professor of Philosophy
Slippery Rock University
Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

SELLING POINT

IN SEPARATE ARTICLES, ANDREI Cherny and Ryan Lizza get it right: Democrats continue to lose because they court voters with a litany of polled issues while Republicans talk about larger themes related to people's values and day-to-day lives ("Renewed Deal" and "Bad Message," November 22, 2004). But, by basing their analyses on historical and anecdotal political data, Cherny and Lizza miss the bigger lesson: Democrats need to follow Republicans in embracing the sophisticated techniques that corporate America uses to influence consumers. As long ago as 1984, Republicans were using consumer marketing techniques in presidential politics. Ronald Reagan's polling firm, Wirthlin Worldwide, was a proponent of Means-End Theory, which demonstrates that benefits and values have more influence than product attributes on consumer decisions. Wirthlin applied this theory to develop the "Morning Again in America" theme for Reagan's reelection. In the twenty-first century, Republican strategists like Karl Rove have made an art of putting values and benefits at the heart of campaign messages; Democratic strategists who lack backgrounds in corporate communications, such as Bob Shrum, still focus on issues. Until Democrats learn that issues need to add up to larger themes, they are going to have a hard time winning back Americans.

SCOTT SEIDEWITZ
Cincinnati, Ohio

THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 232, Number 1, Issue 4,696, January 17, 2005. (Printed in the United States on January 6, 2005.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated March 28 & April 4, May 2 & 9, June 6 & 13, July 11 & 18, August 22 & 29, November 28 & December 5, and December 26, 2005 through January 9, 2006) at 1331 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Allen Chin at (202) 508-4444 or our NY sales office at (212) 465-8447. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97; foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $8.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling). © 2005 by The New Republic, LLC. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9383. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: letters@tnr.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call (800) 827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Assessment of Arafat

Will his death open the way for peace?

Yasser Arafat dominated the scene of the Arab/Israeli conflict for over fifty years. Now that he has died, many believe that new leadership will emerge and that peace will finally come to the Holy Land. Is that a valid assumption?

What are the facts?

Review of an Evil Life: In order to analyze the situation, it is necessary to assess Yasser Arafat and what he has wrought. A Latin proverb admonishes us to say nothing but good about the dead. The Bible, on the other hand, in Proverbs (11:10) states that "when the wicked perish, there is shouting." Following that admonition, one can say without hesitation that Yasser Arafat was certainly one of the most wicked men of this and the last century. While he was not able to work on as vast a plane as Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin, he was certainly in the same evil league.

Here are just a few "highlights" of this monster's career. He was personally responsible for the murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics; he directed the execution of two American diplomats in Sudan; he masterminded the cold-blooded murder of 25 people – 21 of them children – in Ma'alot, a city in northern Israel; he authorized the takeover of the Italian cruise ship ACHILLE LAURO, and the murder of a wheelchair-bound American citizen. He was the originator of the infamous crime of suicide bombings and brought it to a horrified world. He was the inventor of the hijacking and bombing of airplanes that killed thousands. And that is just the tip of the evil iceberg.

As a result of the disastrous Oslo Accord, Arafat was allowed to return to Israel from his exile in Tunis. In the last year of his presidency, President Clinton convened a Camp David summit with Arafat and Ehud Barak, then the prime minister of Israel. Arafat got virtually everything he ever demanded, except the "right of return" of the descendants of the Palestinian "refugees," which would have been the end of the Jewish state.

Little Hope in the New Man: Arafat rejected this more than generous offer and decided instead to start his bloody "intifada," which by now has cost over 1,000 Jewish lives – and three times as many Arab lives and untold thousands wounded on both sides. The Palestinian economy is in ruins. More than one-half of its population is without work; famine would be rampant were it not for the constant infusion of cash by the U.S. and other western countries (most of it pilfered by Arafat and his cohorts and stashed in secret accounts all over the world).

But the greatest harm, the greatest crime that Arafat committed was to poison the minds of two generations of Palestinian Arabs against Israel and against the Jews. Evil propaganda permeates all Palestinian media. Palestinian children, beginning with pre-school, learn to hate Jews and Israel, and to become "*shahids*" – martyrs and suicide bombers. The State of Israel does not appear in Arab textbooks; the area is described as "Occupied Palestine." Even with the best effort, it may take at least two generations to change that mind set.

> "Arafat's main interest was not the creation of a Palestinian state. His primary goal, ceaselessly pursued, was the destruction of Israel."

In retrospect, it seems almost incredible and a cruel joke that such a man, such a fiend, would have received the Nobel Peace Prize and that presidents, prime ministers and secretaries of state of major countries would have attended this man's funeral in Cairo. Our president at least had the good taste to send only a lower-level state department functionary.

Much hope is pinned on Mahmoud Abbas, who appears likely to emerge from the inevitable power struggle as the new leader of the Palestinians. But it is most likely that this hope is misplaced. Sure, Abbas obviously has a better tailor and a better barber than Arafat had, and that might make him appear more congenial to Western audiences. But he was Arafat's second-in-command for decades and shares his late master's views in all respects. He got his doctorate in political science from a Soviet university and wrote his thesis on the Holocaust never having taken place. He has already put himself on record that in any negotiation with the Israelis to which he might agree, he will never waver on his insistence on the right of return of the Palestinian "refugees." Since that is obviously a non-starter, it appears that no peace, no settlement can be reached with this man.

Arafat is dead and has gone to his "reward," wherever that might be. He left his people and the territory that the Israelis had generously yielded to him in a shambles. He refused to create any institutions that could possibly become precursors to a government. He looted the treasury that foreign countries – mostly, of course, the United States – had generously provided for the welfare of his constituents. He implanted hate and poisoned the minds of his people. His main interest never seems to have been the creation of a Palestinian state; his primary goal, ceaselessly pursued, was the destruction of Israel. With that heritage, it will take a very long time, if it can ever happen at all, that peace between Arabs and Jews can come about.

This ad has been published and paid for by

FLAME

Facts and Logic About the Middle East
P.O. Box 590359 ■ San Francisco, CA 94159
Gerardo Joffe, President

FLAME is a tax-exempt, non-profit educational 501 (c)(3) organization. Its purpose is the research and publication of the facts regarding developments in the Middle East and exposing false propaganda that might harm the interests of the United States and its allies in that area of the world. Your tax-deductible contributions are welcome. They enable us to pursue these goals and to publish these messages in national newspapers and magazines. We have virtually no overhead. Almost all of our revenue pays for our educational work, for these clarifying messages, and for related direct mail.

To receive free FLAME updates, visit our website: www.factsandlogic.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Distant Shores

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

GIVE THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION a B. Its initial reaction to the tsunami was awful: A pathetic $15 million in aid and four days of presidential silence while the death toll mounted. But, when the pressure grew strong enough, the Bushies—as they sometimes do (remember the Homeland Security Department and the 9/11 Commission)—reversed course and did the right thing. And, since then, America's humanitarian and symbolic response has been good.

More disturbing, and more revealing, has been the response of the conservative intelligentsia. On December 28, in its first editorial on the catastrophe, *The Wall Street Journal* attacked liberals for politicizing the event. "One might think that a disaster of this scale would transcend normal national or political considerations," its editors wrote. "But in the world of environmental zealotry, even an event such as this is seen as an opportunity to press the agenda." The next day, the *Journal*, never one to use tragedy to "press the agenda," published an editorial titled "DEATH BY ENVIRONMENTALIST," which blamed environmentalists for exacerbating the threat of malaria in tsunami-stricken areas. Two days later, the *Journal* used the tsunami to attack the United Nations, Western Europe, and taxes, (and, in its web edition, to defend America's military presence in Asia).

The *Journal* was symptomatic. In general, the right has been fairly quiet about the tsunami. (As of this writing, *The Weekly Standard*'s website had yet to devote a single article to the topic. A Nexis search of "tsunami" as THE NEW REPUBLIC went to press revealed 417 discussions on CNN and a mere 116 on Fox.) But, even when they have written about it, conservatives have focused (with notable exceptions, such as Michael Fumento's article on *National Review Online*) on the U.S. response. On January 3 alone, *National Review Online* devoted three articles to rebutting charges that the Bush administration had been "stingy." On Fox's flagship Sunday show, the panel discussion focused on—you guessed it—whether President Bush had done enough.

Almost entirely absent from conservative commentary has been any discussion of how the tsunami will affect South and Southeast Asia. Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, is emerging from decades of military rule. Now its military is overseeing disaster relief in the very region where, a month ago, it was putting down an armed rebellion. In the months before the tsunami, Muslim-Buddhist violence in Thailand had been threatening to spiral out of control. Sri Lanka has a religiously and ethnically based civil war as well. For all three fragile democracies, the tsunami's social and political consequences will likely prove profound. The newspapers have devoted considerable space to those consequences. Why don't conservatives seem to care?

Because the tsunami has uncovered a dirty little secret about the right today: Conservatives are fascinated by American power, but they are not all that interested in the world. In the 1990s, observers frequently noted the Republican Congress's indifference to the world beyond U.S. shores. In 1998, then–House Majority Leader Dick Armey infamously said that "I've been to Europe once. I don't have to go again." When Republican Representative Sonny Callahan assumed the chairmanship of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations in 1995, he noted that he had never voted for a foreign aid bill. He proceeded to oppose funding the Wye River Accord between Israel and the Palestinians, quipping, according to *The Washington Post*'s Robert G. Kaiser, that "every time somebody walks in the White House with a turban on his head . . . the president says, 'Let me give you a little bit of money.' " In 1999, John McCain worried about the "growing isolationism in the Republican Party."

Conventional wisdom holds that all this has changed since September 11. And, in a sense, the right has been transformed—conservatives have grown extremely interested in using the U.S. military to stop terrorism and nuclear proliferation. But that's not the same as becoming interested in the world. True internationalism means taking an interest in events overseas even when they don't bear directly on the war on terrorism; when they are not easily amenable to American power. It means being interested in the world, at least partly, merely because we live in it. By that standard, the isolationism of the '90s remains alive and well. Even in the best conservative publications, there is little reporting from abroad, and most of what there is involves the war on terrorism. A while back, *National Review Online*, the flagship website of the U.S. right, published a blog discussion about the African leaders with the strangest names, as if to say, "Who could possibly care?"

The tsunami is an almost perfect case study in conservative isolationism. It is a massive event in the recent history of the world. And yet it is a trivial event in the history of American power. None of the devastated countries threaten the United States; none are staging grounds for a conflict between the United States and a foreign power; the tragedy offers no role for the U.S. military except in delivering humanitarian supplies. And so conservatives feel compassion, as all decent people do. But, politically, they aren't that interested. Why should they be? Sri Lanka's fate has little bearing on U.S. national interests.

But the irony is that defeating Islamist terrorism requires convincing people around the world that the United States does *not* act merely out of narrow national interest. To win over global hearts and minds, the United States must show Muslims, and others, that we are benevolent—that we want a better world *for them*; that we are not just in it for empire and oil. That means financial generosity—giving money for economic and social development rather than only military assistance. But it also means what might be called intellectual generosity—a genuine curiosity about the rest of the world, even when our safety is not directly threatened, even when the dramas aren't primarily about us.

It is that curiosity that is so profoundly absent from Bush, who tries to see as little as possible of the countries he visits. (When Bill Clinton went to Africa in 1998, he visited six countries in eleven days; when Bush went in 2003, he visited five countries in five days.) And which is absent from his administration more generally, which invaded Iraq yet scorned the advice of those specialists who knew the country best. Today's conservatives want to dominate and transform the world—as long as they don't have to learn too much about it in the process. **PETER BEINART**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

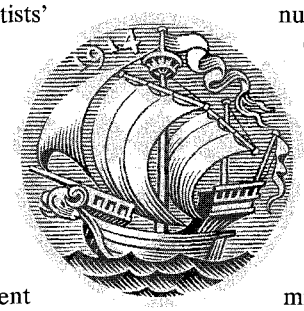
Labor Pains

THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT of 1935 was once considered the crown jewel of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which it created, was supposed to ensure that workers enjoyed the same freedom of association in the workplace that they did in the political arena. By guaranteeing that workers could organize without being fired or threatened, it redressed the growing imbalance of power in the workplace.

By encouraging the growth of the labor movement, it stilled the fires of revolutionary socialism and Huey Long's populism and laid the foundation for a new democratic pluralism by giving workers a seat in Washington next to business.

For 45 years, the Act worked reasonably well. The ranks of labor swelled without threatening the profitability of U.S. business. The gap between rich and poor, which had widened in the 1920s, was reduced. The AFL-CIO, courted by Republican and Democratic administrations, became part of the Washington consensus. But, in the 1980s, that consensus began to fall apart when the Reagan administration drastically cut the NLRB's funding—causing huge backlogs of cases—and when its appointee to the board chipped away at employees' bargaining rights and at penalties for unfair labor practices. Bill Clinton tried to undo some of the damage, but George W. Bush has resumed Reagan's approach. Since becoming a majority in 2003, his appointees to the NLRB have taken business's side in more than 25 controversial cases. None of these rulings was earthshaking, but together, they presage an erosion of workers' ability to organize.

To cut costs, business and public institutions have increasingly replaced full-time employees with temporary or apprentice workers who are not paid comparable wages or benefits. Nonstandard workers like these now make up about a quarter of the workforce. Labor unions have begun to organize them, but employers have objected, and the Bush board has taken their side—ruling, for example, that a union at an Oakdale, New York, long-term care facility cannot organize and represent both workers employed directly by the facility and workers who are employed by the facility but were sent there by a temporary staffing agency. It also blocked organizing of disabled janitors (because they are really engaged in rehabilitation rather than work) and artists' models (who are seen as independent contractors because they own their robes).



According to a study of 400 union election campaigns in manufacturing plants by Cornell sociologist Kate Bronfenbrenner, 51 percent of employers in 1998 and 1999 threatened to close a plant if a union won an election, and 25 percent fired at least one worker for union activity. Bush's NLRB has balked at penalizing such companies—even though it is exactly these tactics that the Act was created to outlaw. In 2000, a judge determined that Smithfield Food used 36 different illegal tactics in trying to block unionization at its plant—including firing eleven organizers—and ruled that the company would have to hold a union election, allow union organizers to post notices on workers' bulletin boards, and let them talk to workers in "nonwork" areas of the plant. On appeal, however, Bush's NLRB ruled that the union should be denied what it termed "extraordinary access" to the company's workers.

Union membership has plummeted from 23 percent in 1979 to 12.5 percent today. Some of that drop is due to a shift from unionized manufacturing industries to nonunionized white-collar services, but most of the decline stems from the NLRB's acquiescence to aggressive—and often illegal—employer tactics. American workers are, of course, the principal victims of labor's decline. (Union workers enjoy a 15.5 percent advantage in wages over nonunion workers with comparable skills and are 18.3 percent more likely to have health insurance.) But our democratic system as a whole is also a victim. Unions are an interest group, but one whose scope and concern allows it to speak for the public interest. And, because of its numbers and electoral influence, labor has been able to check the often narrow interests of Washington's powerful business lobbies. Without labor's clout, it's unlikely that Medicare would have been enacted in 1965 or that the minimum wage would have been raised repeatedly over the last 50 years.

With labor's power ebbing, business has increasingly been able to dominate public policy issues, from taxes to environmental protection to Social Security. That might not bother Bush, Tom DeLay, and Karl Rove. But it's not a good thing for the rest of us. ■

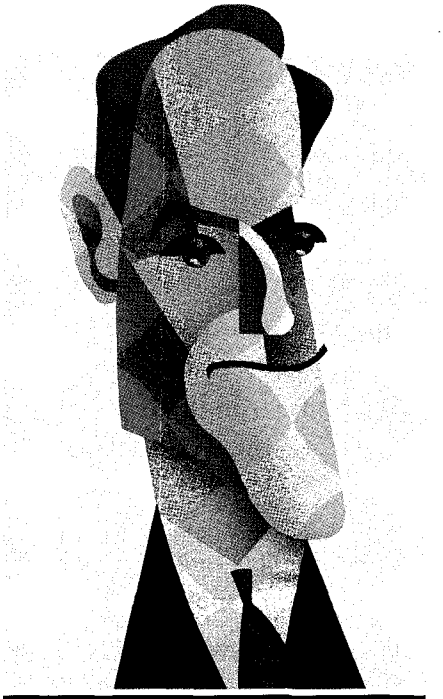
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOTEBOOK

FOR ELIOT SPITZER, DESERVED PRAISE . . . FROM THE VATICAN, UNDESERVED CRITICISM

A WORTHY MAN OF THE YEAR

ONE THING THAT HAS BECOME ALL too apparent during George W. Bush's presidency is the difference between principled, free-market conservatism and the special interest crony capitalism favored by today's GOP. And one of the best illustrations of this difference is the contrast between the editorial pages of *The Wall Street Journal* and Britain's *Financial Times*. Though both are nominally conservative, the *Journal*'s ostensible free-market principles usually bear an uncanny resemblance to White House talking points. By contrast, the *FT* criticizes the administration's economic policies (on steel tariffs, on its yawning deficit, on its reckless dollar devaluation) as often as it praises them. So it's telling that, while New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer's efforts to police Wall Street have made him a perennial *Journal* bogeyman—for instance, in July 2003, the paper accused him of blackmailing CEOs "into agreeing to quasi-regulatory changes that [he] had no business dictating on behalf of the rest of the country"—the *FT* saw the several-month stretch in which Spitzer announced both a high-profile investigation of the insurance industry and his own campaign for governor as an opportunity to name him "man of the year." The *FT* editorial wasn't all glowing—it worried about the possibility that Spitzer had overreached, perhaps even triggering an anti-regulation backlash. But it approvingly noted his critical role in exposing "serious abuses" in the financial services industry, including the practices mutual funds and stock research analysts used to cheat ordinary investors. (After William Donaldson succeeded Harvey Pitt as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Commission took up its responsibilities on these matters as well.) Spitzer has also shown that bidding for rates on insurance policies among the big insurance companies was often rigged. And he is fixed on whether companies that guarantee debt have cooked their books. The details of these cases can be mind-numbingly technical. But, taken together, they cut right to the integrity of democratic capitalism. The truly popular base of stock ownership in the country is undermined when the probity of the markets is in doubt. So many investment banks, accounting firms, and brokerages had rigged the numbers or tilted the odds that someone had to blow the whistle. Spitzer did, and at a time when no one else was up to the task. (It's something we wish *New York* magazine's recent depiction of Spitzer as a "bullying do-gooder" had dwelled on a bit more.) Good for him for rising to the occasion. And good for honest conservatives for acknowledging it. Let's hope the voters of New York do as well.



Eliot Spitzer

BEATIFYING VILLANY AND CRITICIZING SAINTLINESS

ON DECEMBER 28, THE ITALIAN daily *Corriere della Serra* published yet another document testifying to the cruelty of Pope Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli) toward the Jewish victims of Nazism. This one, a 1946 letter from the Holy Office, explicitly approved by the Pope himself, to Angelo Roncalli, the papal nuncio in Paris and later Pope John XXIII, confirmed the principle that baptized Jewish children in the Church's care during the Holocaust should not be restored to surviving parents after it. Even unbaptized Jewish orphans were not to be turned over to other family members. Historians have long known Pius XII's views on the matter, which evoke the Church's history of kidnapping Jewish children in order to save their souls. (The historian Daniel Kreutzer has written a chilling book, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, about one such instance that became a cause célèbre during the nineteenth century.) These were not, though, Roncalli's views, and he, lonely among his brothers, did not obey the Holy Father's commands. In fact, in neutral Istanbul during the war, he tried to assist Jews in ways that Pius in Rome forbade. In any case, this particular missive clinches the argument against Pius. Still, it is not likely to impede John Paul II's obsession with morphing the pitiless Pius XII into a saint. (The present incumbent at St. Peter's has made more saints than any of his predecessors.)

If the Church's record on Jewish questions weren't bad enough, the Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, has responded to the tsunami by criticizing not the United Nations, or countries like Thailand that decided not to warn their people for fear of hurting tourism, but, you guessed it, Israel. This is especially bizarre since Israel was among the first to react practically to the disaster, as it has done many times elsewhere, most recently in the 1999 earthquake in Turkey. The church paper criticized Israel for not sending sufficient assistance to Sri Lanka. As it happens, a 50-person

DAVID COWLES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Israeli team, headed by four Hadassah Hospital doctors, was already on the ground in that country with medical supplies, food, tents, and blankets. The Israelis had also assembled another massive team of rescue personnel bound for Colombo. But Sri Lankan officials said this group was too big and wasn't needed, which the Israelis on the ground said was sheer nonsense. Israel remains prepared to dispatch more personnel to the island. In any case, the Jewish state has helped spearhead the overall relief effort in the region from the beginning, along with the United States, Japan, Brazil, India, and Australia. *Osservatore*'s charges against Israel are, then, not just lies; they are sordid falsifications. Flush with cash from the highest-priced oil in history, Saudi Arabia has contributed exactly $30 million, a risible amount that wouldn't make a big mark even if it were limited to Sumatra, where Saudi zillions have been spent promoting fanatical Islam. (Rome, not surprisingly, has not commented on this.) Little thanks to Riyadh, supplies are gradually being delivered to the devastated areas—largely by Seahawk helicopters from U.S. aircraft carriers. Without this deployment of U.S. choppers and the men and women flying them—according to the Associated Press, the largest marshaling of such military resources in the area since the Vietnam War—much of the relief aid would never arrive where it is needed. You can be certain France would not have taken up this burden; neither would Russia or China. And the pathetically inapt and inept United Nations simply couldn't, all of its wordy plenipotentiaries notwithstanding. After all, pronouncements do not prevent cholera. The fact is that real effectiveness in this effort devolves, whether by default of others or American competence, on us. The Bush administration, which stumbled at first, has now seized this responsibility, and its citizenry would have it no other way. ■

TNR.commentary

IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

SADR ALL OVER THE PLACE: On January 5, *The New York Times* had an excellent story about Moqtada Al Sadr's dual-tracked strategies for the election. Sadr has in fact "quietly approved" of the inclusion of 20 of his followers on the United Iraqi Alliance ticket; he has allowed a 180-candidate slate of Sadrists, called the Independent National Leaders, to run against the Alliance; and, all the while, he is publicly sitting out the vote. As Iraqi democrat Ghassan Al Atiyah told the *Times*, "Moqtada is keeping his options open."

That's quite an understatement. Sadr is keeping more than just his political options open. Despite an apparent suspension of hostilities against the United States and Iyad Allawi, Sadr's followers are routinely arrested on suspicion of causing violence. Last week, the Associated Press reported that 20 Mahdi Army militiamen were nabbed in the south on suspicion of planting explosives and attacking police stations. Knight-Ridder's Hannah Allam and Qassim Mohammed reported in early December—when the Alliance's formation became public—that Najaf police discovered a Mahdi weapons cache of 200 rocket-propelled grenades, 75 anti-tank mines, and six anti-aircraft weapons.

One of Sadr's loyalists on the Independent National Leaders ticket, Fatah Al Sheik, left no doubt about the ultimate target of Sadr's political and military weapons: The Najaf religious establishment now represented by the Alliance. Emphasizing that none of Sadr's followers was an "exile" (*cough*—Abdul Aziz Al Hakim—*cough*) Sheik told the *Times*:

> During the Najaf troubles last fall, those people left Moqtada all by himself. The Mahdi Army was getting killed, and they stayed silent and watched. When American warplanes bombed Sadr City, those big parties did nothing, and the ayatollah's people did nothing.

Sheik's party is largely based in Sadr City and will probably make an impressive showing there, though whether that will make it a significant force in the transitional parliament is far from certain. And that comment about how the "big parties" did nothing to stop the "American warplanes" indicates the strong card that they have to play against Ali Al Sistani: the occupation. As the Alliance is sending signals that it "see[s] the necessity of American troops for the time being," as an aide to Hakim recently said, it grants a potent issue—possibly the *most* potent issue—to Sadr.

Sadr has the weapons and he has the issues. It remains to be seen whether the vastly more moderate Alliance can outflank him. The question of when the United States will leave is probably the first test—and when American generals and diplomats sit down at that bargaining table with the Alliance, they need to keep that in mind.

THE NEW OPTIMISM: "There are some parts of the Sunni Triangle where the security right now, frankly, is not that bad. In parts of Diyala Province, some parts of Salahuddin Province, some parts of Nineveh Province, [the situation] is not all blood and fire and destruction in all places every day." —senior State Department official in Iraq, briefing Pentagon reporters on January 4

THE SPOILS OF INSURGENCY: Given that senior administration officials have abandoned hope that this month's election will drain the insurgency of its momentum, it's worth considering what effect conditions of persistent emergency have on government officials. *The Financial Times* gave a clue on December 29, reporting that Iraq's trade ministry transferred $400 million of Iraq's food-ration budget to Lebanese banks that are, as the paper put it, "favoured for their secrecy." That figure represents about 14 percent of Iraq's $2.8 billion annual budget for food rations, upon which 60 percent of 25 million Iraqis is dependent, according to the United Nations. The interim trade minister, Mohammed Jabouri, claims that his noble intentions—expediting the delivery of food rations for Ramadan by bypassing Iraqi Trade Bank protocols—are being maliciously interpreted by "political parties who have come after the war." It doesn't exactly inspire confidence that, under Saddam Hussein, Jabouri, according to the *FT*:

> headed the State Oil Market Organisation (Somo), which sold Iraq's oil and distributed coupons for oil sales prior to the war. His deputy, Fakhridin Rashan, was a senior official in the trade ministry. Both were suspended after the war following investigations into contracts they had pursued, but were reinstated after the transition to Ayad Allawi's interim government in June.

And, mysteriously, the *FT* reported that more than a month after the close of Ramadan, those food rations still had not arrived. Get ready for a lot more of these sorts of stories.

TO READ THESE NEW REPUBLIC WEB LOGS DAILY, GO TO TNR.COM

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The tsunami's real cause.

Rising Tide

BY DANIEL SAREWITZ AND ROGER A. PIELKE JR.

THE INCREASING THREAT of natural disasters has long been cited as one of many reasons why society should reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and the horrendous toll of the December 26 Indonesian earthquake and resulting tsunami has only made those calls louder. A December 30 article in *Salon* portrays the effects of the recent tsunami as "visions of just the kind of tumultuous weather that scientists have long viewed as a symptom of global warming." A day later, Sir David King, Britain's chief science adviser, told the BBC, "What is happening in the Indian Ocean underlines the importance of the Earth's system to our ability to live safely. And what we are talking about in terms of climate change is something that is really driven by our own use of fossil fuels."

Such arguments have a rich pedigree. Only nine days before the tsunami, Klaus Toepfer, executive director of the U.N. Environment Programme, said, "Climate scientists anticipate an increase [in] intensity of extreme weather events." Environmental groups use the threat of increasing disasters to advocate decisive action to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and implement the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. The advocacy group Scientists and Engineers for Change supported John Kerry in the 2004 election by posting billboards in storm-ravaged Florida with the message, GLOBAL WARMING = WORSE HURRICANES. GEORGE BUSH JUST DOESN'T GET IT.

Global climate change is real, and developing alternative energy sources and reducing global carbon-dioxide emission is essential. But the claim that action to slow climate change is justified by the rising toll of natural disasters—and, by extension, that reducing emissions can help stanch these rising losses—is both scientifically and morally insupportable. To minimize damage from tsunamis and the like, we need to focus not on reducing emissions but on reducing our vulnerability to disasters.

THE FIRST THING to understand about disasters is that they have indeed been rapidly increasing worldwide over the past century, in both number and severity, and that the causes of this increase are well understood—and have nothing to do with global warming. Data from the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters in Brussels, Belgium, as well as the Red Cross and the reinsurance industry, show that the number of disasters affecting at least 100 people or resulting in a call for international assistance has increased from an average of about 100 per year in the late '60s to between 500 and 800 per year by the early twenty-first century. The reason is not an increase in the frequency or severity of storms, earthquakes, or similar events, but an increase in vulnerability because of growing populations, expanding economies, rapid urbanization, and migrations to coasts and other exposed regions.

These changes are reflected in the costs of major disasters, which, according to the German insurance company Munich Re, rose more than tenfold in the second half of the twentieth century, from an average of about $4 billion per year in the 1950s to more than $40 billion in the 1990s, in inflation-adjusted dollars. The great Miami hurricane of 1926, for example, caused about $76 million in damage; when Hurricane Andrew, of similar force, struck South Florida in 1992, it caused more than $30 billion in damage, again adjusted for inflation. Research suggests that, if the same 1926 storm were to hit Miami today, it would cost more than $80 billion.

The economic losses from disasters are increasingly concentrated in the affluent world. But, as a percentage of GNP, the economic effects of natural disasters on poor countries can be hundreds of times greater. Damages from Hurricane Mitch, for example, which devastated Central America in 1998, were estimated at between $5 and $7 billion—or almost the annual combined total economic activity of the two hardest-hit nations, Honduras and Nicaragua. Their economies still have not recovered. By comparison, the magnitude 6.7 earthquake that struck California in 1994, one of the costliest disasters in U.S. history, caused an estimated $20 to $40 billion in losses, but this amounted to only 2 to 4 percent of California's economic activity.

Disasters disproportionately harm poor people in poor countries because those countries typically have densely populated coastal regions, shoddily constructed buildings, sparse infrastructure, and grossly inadequate public health capabilities. Poor land use leads to widespread environmental degradation, such as deforestation and wetlands destruction, which in turn exacerbates flooding and landslides. Emergency preparation and response capabilities are often inadequate, and hazard insurance is usually unavailable, further slowing recovery. Thus, while the world's poorest 35 countries make up only about 10 percent of the world's population, they suffered more than half of the disaster-related deaths between 1992 and 2001.

Disparities in disaster vulnerability between rich and poor will continue to grow. About 97 percent of population growth is occurring in the developing world. This growth, in turn, drives urbanization and coastal migration. The result is that, in the next two decades, the population of urban areas in the developing world will likely increase by two billion

Daniel Sarewitz is professor of science and society, and director of the Consortium for Science, Policy & Outcomes, at Arizona State University. Roger A. Pielke Jr. is professor of environmental studies, and director of the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research, at the University of Colorado.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people. And this population is being added to cities that are mostly located on coastal or flood plains—or in earthquake zones—and are unable to provide the quality of housing, services, infrastructure, and environmental protection that can help reduce vulnerability.

FACED WITH THE inescapable momentum of these socioeconomic trends as we clean up from the South Asian disaster, the crucial question is this: What can be done to better prepare the world—especially the developing world—for future disasters? It is absurd to suggest that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is an important part of the answer.

The chief reason is that the role of demographics in making a country vulnerable to disaster overwhelms that of a warming atmosphere. Indeed, the most recent assessment of the scientifically authoritative Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found no evidence to support the idea that human-caused climate change has discernibly influenced the rapidly increasing disaster toll of recent decades. While IPCC data and predictions indicate that human-caused climate change may have an effect on future disasters, our analysis of hurricanes and tropical cyclones, using IPCC data and assumptions, shows that, for every $1 of additional disaster damage scientists expect will be caused by the effects of global warming by 2050, an additional $22 to $60 of damages will result from the growth of economies and populations. Other studies of hurricanes, flooding, and heat waves lead to a similar conclusion: Socioeconomic trends, not climate change, will continue to drive increasing disaster losses.

The example of rising sea levels provides further illustration. Scientists expect that, by 2050, average global sea levels will rise by two to twelve inches. But no research suggests that the Kyoto Protocol, or even more ambitious emissions-reduction proposals, would significantly reduce this increase. Meanwhile, coastal populations will continue to grow by hundreds of millions, mostly in developing countries. Bangladesh alone, which suffered about 140,000 deaths from a cyclone in 1991, may add up to 100 million people to its population by 2050. The world will indeed be more vulnerable to tsunamis in the future, but, once again, the causes are primarily socioeconomic change, not climate change.

Yet assertions that global warming is directly linked to rising disaster losses persist. Such assertions may have short-term political benefits in the global warming debate, but they detract from serious efforts to prepare for disasters. Global climate change has been a potent focusing lens for environmental groups, governments, the scientific research establishment, and international bodies, especially the United Nations. The U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change—and its Kyoto Protocol mandating emissions reductions—occupies thousands of advocates, diplomats, scientists, lawyers, and journalists. The climate change policy agenda has also sucked into its maw a wide range of other issues, such as energy policy, water policy, public health and infectious diseases, deforestation, and, of course, disasters. Climate change thus captures a huge proportion of the public attention, political energy, and financial and intellectual resources available for addressing global environmental challenges—including disaster preparedness. Uncontrolled urban growth exacerbates hazards and urban growth.

The U.N. Framework Convention, for example, refused to fund disaster preparedness efforts at its last conference in December unless states could demonstrate exactly how the disasters they feared were linked to climate change. Consider, too, the amount spent on scientific research. According to a recent RAND study, U.S. funding of disaster loss-reduction research in 2003 amounted to about $127 million—only 7 percent of the amount invested in climate change research for that year. Efforts in Congress to create a coordinated research program focused on reducing disaster losses have never gained momentum. By contrast, the U.S. government has sponsored a coordinated, multi-agency framework for climate change research for more than 15 years, with total investments, by our calculations, of more than $30 billion, adjusted for inflation.

This is not to say that many thousands of people and hundreds of organizations worldwide are not productively confronting disaster vulnerability, but their efforts do not begin to address the magnitude of the problem. Thousands of participants from most of the world's nations, along with scientists and political advocates, have come together every year since 1995 to work toward concerted international action on climate change. But, when the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction convenes later this week, it will be the first such meeting in more than a decade.

While the prospects for global climate change are constantly in the public eye, the South Asian earthquake and tsunami poignantly demonstrate that the crisis of growing disaster vulnerability only becomes news after disaster strikes. Yet we know that effective action is possible to reduce disaster losses even in the face of poverty and dense population. During the 2004 hurricane season, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, both on the island of Hispaniola, provided a powerful lesson in this regard. As Julia Taft of the U.N. Development Program explained: "In the Dominican Republic, which has invested in hurricane shelters and emergency evacuation networks, the death toll was fewer than ten, as compared to an estimated two thousand in Haiti. ... Haitians were a hundred times more likely to die in an equivalent storm than Dominicans."

Most tools needed to reduce disaster vulnerability already exist, such as risk assessment techniques, better building codes and code enforcement, land-use standards, and emergency-preparedness plans. The question is why disaster vulnerability is so low on the list of global development priorities. Says Brian Tucker, president of GeoHazards International, "The most serious flaw in our current efforts is the lack of a globally accepted standard of acceptable disaster vulnerability, and an action plan to put every country on course to achieve this standard. Then we would have a means to measure progress and to make it clear which countries are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doing well and which are not. We need a natural disaster equivalent to the Kyoto Protocol."

THOSE WHO JUSTIFY the need for greenhouse gas reductions by exploiting the mounting human and economic toll of natural disasters worldwide are either ill-informed or dishonest. This is not, as Britain's Sir David King suggested, "something we can manage" by decreasing our use of fossil fuels. Prescribing emissions reductions to forestall the future effects of disasters is like telling someone who is sedentary, obese, and alcoholic that the best way to improve his health is to wear a seat belt.

In principle, fruitful action on both climate change and disasters should proceed simultaneously. In practice, this will not happen until the issues of climate change and disaster vulnerability are clearly separated in the eyes of the media, the public, environmental activists, scientists, and policymakers. As long as people think that GLOBAL WARMING = WORSE HURRICANES, global warming will also equal less preparation. And disasters will claim ever more money and lives. ■

Bangkok Dispatch

After

BY JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

THE BANGKOK AIRPORT'S Burger King normally isn't that crowded in the morning. Most Thais seem to prefer the nearby food court, which serves Thai rice soups rather than heavy egg-and-biscuit American breakfasts. But, on Monday morning last week, the day after a massive tsunami swamped Thailand and the rest of Southeast and South Asia, the area around Burger King is packed. Several Thai monks, dressed in the simple orange and saffron robes of the Buddhist clergy, their heads shaved completely bare, are surrounded by locals and foreigners. Men, women, and small children all press offerings into the monks' hands and quietly ask for blessings, for good fortune that might help bring their families back to them. The young monks, some of whom appear no older than twelve and seem frightened by such awesome responsibilities, dutifully take whatever is pressed into their palms.

The rest of the airport is not so serene. At one Thai Airways counter, shell-shocked Western tourists up from southern resort islands like Phuket, where more than 1,000 visitors have already perished, try to figure out how to get home, given that the only possessions they retain are the torn clothes on their backs. European, Japanese, and American diplomats, frantic and screaming, grab passengers arriving off planes from the south, demanding any information about survivors. Nearby, Bangkok Thais who have family in the south stand huddled around televisions, scanning for news about the dead and wailing—unusual in a country where openly expressing negative emotions is discouraged—at what they hear. Screams of "Ay! Ay!" ring out. Some older women collapse at the televised sight of whole southern villages washed away and bloated dead bodies piling up on previously squeaky white sand beaches. The Thai prime minister, a go-getter CEO type who normally grins constantly, appears on television; he looks utterly wrecked.

THE NUMBERS RING up like the grim reaper's pinball machine. Five hundred in Thailand. One thousand. Then 2,000. More. Forty thousand across the region. Then 50,000. Eighty thousand. One hundred thousand. No one is spared. Thai friends' relatives are dead. My local fixer's family members are dead. Nearly everyone on Phi Phi Island, a prime resort immortalized by the Leonardo DiCaprio film *The Beach*, is dead; only two hotels on the entire island still stand. It seems half of Sri Lanka is dead. The Thai king's grandson is dead. The former finance minister is dead. Last year's *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit cover girl clings to a tree in the water off western Thailand for eight hours; otherwise she, too, would be dead. I wonder, guiltily, whether the daughter of a family friend who'd called me in early December to ask advice on Thailand, and whom I assured the Thai beach resorts were safe—from bandits or sex tourists, not from giant waves—is dead.

In the Thai south, the situation is Dantesque. Searching for relatives, dazed survivors wander Thailand's beaches, where bodies are being stacked. Many worry that aftershocks will return. Pediatric wards are reportedly packed with children wailing for their parents. Thai dentists are rushing to identify the dead by their jaw records before they must be buried in mass graves; whole primary school classes have been washed away together with their teachers. At local hospitals, foreign tourists tearfully receive news of lost loved ones; thousands are still missing in Phang Nga Bay, an achingly beautiful region of limestone karsts rising straight out of the warm water like a moonscape—and now one of the hardest-hit areas. For some reason, of all the Western travelers, Scandinavians seem to have taken the brunt of the hit—diplomats say this may be the worst disaster in Scandinavian history. The fragile coral ecosystem that made Thailand famous lies in ruin. Cars and three-wheeled *tuk-tuks* have been upended and tossed by the waves into bizarre, abstract patterns all over beach towns. A few stiff-upper-lipped vacationers—Brits, probably—have reportedly returned to the remaining beaches to sunbathe, along with one unshakable Thai masseuse.

I fly to the deep south, into the majority Muslim area of Thailand bordering Malaysia, where an insurgency and a resulting government crackdown has led to bloodshed, turning Muslims against Buddhists and vice versa. But now even this troubled region, where flak-jacketed soldiers with heavy machine guns patrol the streets at night and bombs explode routinely, is a bit quieter. Here, too, people gather

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around TV screens anywhere they can. Many mutter "*fon tok*, *fon tok*" over and over, using the Thai phrase for the regular monsoon that comes every year, a phrase that doesn't seem appropriate for such a calamity; but then, this event is so rare that Thais don't appear to have a word for it. Some southern Muslims plan eight-hour bus rides up to Phuket to help with humanitarian aid. "I can't believe, I can't believe," my southern friend mutters over and over.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE TSUNAMI also exposes Thailand's pretensions. For more than a decade, the country has been poised between developing and developed, building new rail systems, hotels, and flashy financial districts in an attempt to join the Asian tigers—Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and others—in the First World. Since coming to power in 2001, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a billionaire telecommunications tycoon before entering politics, has aggressively promoted Thailand's state-led economic model as an example for other nations, a model that has come to be known throughout Asia as "Thaksinomics."

Bangkok may have a skyline to match any city, an übermodern subway, and Saville Row–suited bankers; but, facing this disaster, Thailand's government fails its people, even as individual Thai rescue workers perform superhuman tasks. *The Nation*, the best Thai newspaper, reports that, after the earthquake off Indonesia, Thai officials had roughly 45 minutes to analyze the quake and determine whether to issue a tsunami warning. They didn't, *The Nation* reports, in large part because "officials feared the tourism industry would be affected if an alert were issued but no tsunami transpired." (Tourism is Thailand's biggest earner of foreign exchange.) A warning might have prompted more people on the southern beaches to seek higher ground, potentially saving thousands of lives. Meanwhile, Thailand's national civic defense organization, supposedly designed to handle disasters, suffers from a lack of basic equipment—it reportedly doesn't have the heavy machinery needed to remove debris from stricken areas, allowing search and rescue to proceed. Without enough government-supplied preservative, bodies quickly decompose in the tropical sun, creating a horrific stench. Poor coordination among Thai authorities leads to wild misestimates of casualties and survivors. Only after the tsunami does the government issue suggestions on how citizens should act when faced by a killer wave. "Had the officials in charge that morning been working with a clear-cut, well-rehearsed, and properly communicated procedure, a tsunami warning would have been sounded," notes Nation Group Editor-in-Chief Sutichai Yoon.

Instead, Thais, like people in most developing nations, turn for help not to the state but to those they have always trusted—family members, close friends, religious figures. Thousands of ordinary Thais open their homes to stranded peers and Western tourists in an enormous display of generosity, and even the normally nasty immigration authorities help visitors whose passports have washed away. Volunteers from the country's major hospitals jet to the south to help out, and many individuals, Thai companies, and members of the royal family quickly give blood or set up private donation funds to compensate families of the dead. Thai friends—and people in America—barrage me with e-mails and phone calls to make sure I'm OK. I am. Paradise isn't. ■

El Bireh Dispatch

Power Play

BY DAN EPHRON

THE LOUDSPEAKERS BLARED with the kind of shrill belligerence that Palestinians have come to expect from Hamas rallies. At rallies on the 17th anniversary of the militant Islamic group's founding last week, young men in ski masks and camouflage outfits waved guns and whirled numchuks onstage at an auditorium in El Bireh, a town in the West Bank. Women in head-to-toe *hijabs* marched to military music, holding the Koran in one hand and Hamas's green flag in the other. Even the mock rocket launchers—plastic sewage pipes painted with the colors of the Palestinian flag—appeared mildly menacing. But, when Hassan Yousef, now the mouthpiece of Hamas in the West Bank, took the podium wearing a suit and tie, he looked and sounded more like the leader of a political party. "We can no longer leave the decision-making to one political stream," Yousef said, referring to the decades in which Yasir Arafat's Fatah faction governed alone. "A united leadership is what we need in order to have genuine change in political matters."

Hamas is evolving. Since its inception, its main undertakings were suicide attacks against Israel and charity work with poor Palestinians. But Arafat's sudden departure and war-weariness in the West Bank and Gaza have some in Hamas believing the time is right to parlay the group's popularity into political power. Already, Hamas-backed slates of candidates have taken part in a few local elections and fared well. The group is also expected to take part in parliamentary balloting this May (though it isn't running a candidate for president on January 9). And, while Israeli officials say a Hamas role in Palestinian governance would only wreck chances for a negotiated settlement with Israel—Hamas denies Israel's right to exist—some analysts believe that the group's participation in a national leadership would moderate the Islamists and be good for Palestinians. "Hamas is becoming more pragmatic," Ghazi Hamad, who edits a weekly in Gaza, *Al Risala*, told me recently. "People

Dan Ephron is Jerusalem correspondent for NEWSWEEK.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feel [Hamas] should affect matters politically and not just militarily and that we should participate in every aspect of Palestinian governing."

If the elections last month in 26 West Bank towns are an indicator, Hamas has vast potential as a political party. The balloting marked the first time since 1976 that Palestinians were allowed to elect a mayor and council members in each municipality. When Arafat authorized the staggered election before his death in November, he made sure the first round of voting would take place in communities known as Fatah strongholds. "These twenty-six villages were supposed to be places where Fatah would have no trouble winning," says Hasan Khreisheh, deputy speaker of the Palestinian parliament, who has no political affiliation. But the candidate lists supported by Hamas, classified by the State Department as a "terrorist organization," defeated Fatah in twelve villages and received enough support in seven of them to govern without any other party. In Shoyuch, a village near the West Bank town of Hebron, Hamas took ten seats—compared with one for Fatah.

In many of the villages, corruption was a bigger issue than the fate of Jerusalem or the plight of Palestinian refugees—traditionally the core themes of Palestinian politics. Days before the vote, I traveled to Dahariya, a village in the southern West Bank whose 30,000 residents are neither particularly religious nor especially active in the four-year-old uprising. Several people in the village told me they had had enough of Fatah council members, two of whom had been forced out of the municipality after a corruption scandal. Others complained that, in Arafat's decade-long rule in the West Bank and Gaza, little of the village's $1.3 million budget was spent on community development. "We don't have enough schools in Dahariya," Mujahed Abu Rida, a 36-year-old teacher, told me over coffee in a sparse living room. "The children study in two shifts. The classrooms are unheated. The buildings are run down. It's very hard for them to learn in these conditions." A few months ago, Abu Rida and twelve other teachers formed the Islamic Bloc for Change and, with Hamas's backing, registered for the upcoming election. Though Israel arrested four of the candidates two weeks before the vote, the group went on to win twice as many seats as Fatah on the local council.

Though clan politics also played a role in the elections, the success of the Hamas-backed lists is expected to strengthen those in Hamas who want to push the group further into the mainstream political arena. Hamas boycotted the last parliamentary election in the West Bank and Gaza in 1996, because the balloting was an outgrowth of the Oslo peace accord, which the group opposed. Since then, a quiet debate has ensued inside Hamas between those who think politics will sidetrack the group from its main goal of obliterating Israel and those who believe Hamas should have a broader political ideology. "We're seeing competing trends in Hamas, one radical and one more pragmatic," says Ziad Abu Amr, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council who has acted at times as a mediator between Hamas and Fatah.

Hassan Yousef might be the most outspoken pragmatist. Since emerging from an Israeli prison on November 18, Yousef has told reporters that Hamas would consider reaching a long-term truce with Israel and participating in national politics alongside Fatah. "It's important to create a good atmosphere with the new government of Abu Mazen," Yousef told me at his Ramallah home, referring to Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. A co-founder of Hamas in 1987, Yousef was among about 400 Islamists deported to Lebanon for a year in late 1992. He spent 28 months in Israeli prisons for acting as Hamas's spokesman in the West Bank. When he walked out of prison, his first stop, even before going home to see his wife and children, was Arafat's grave. "We want to avoid any negative relations with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority," he said.

Yousef says Hamas is already negotiating with Abbas over a potential cease-fire with Israel after the Palestinian elections. Abu Amr, the occasional mediator, said the two sides had also discussed the possibility of Hamas joining the PLO. Since the PLO is the source of authority for the Palestinian administration in the West Bank and Gaza, joining it would bring Hamas to the top of the Palestinian political structure. But attempts to formulate common points that would preserve Hamas's opposition to Israel without impinging on Fatah's right to conduct peace talks have hit a snag. "I think both sides are waiting for the parliamentary elections in May," Abu Amr told me. "The results of that vote will tell us exactly what Hamas's political strength is. And the two sides could use that percentage as a guideline for a power-sharing agreement," he said.

Since Hamas has done everything it can in the past decade to spoil peace efforts, most Israelis view talk of its participation in Palestinian governance as a bad sign. An adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told me that a power-sharing agreement between Abbas and Hamas would indicate to Israel that Abu Mazen was turning away from the U.S.-sponsored road map for Middle East peace. "I don't believe you can moderate Hamas," says Efraim Inbar, a political scientist who heads the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University. Inbar thinks that Hamas doesn't truly believe in democracy but, like the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria 13 years ago, wants to use elections to further the group's nondemocratic aims.

But other analysts believe both Israelis and Palestinians would gain from Hamas's turn toward mainstream politics. "I think we're more likely to see the center co-opting Hamas than Hamas radicalizing the center," said Asher Susser, who heads the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University. He said Abbas would have to find a way to neutralize Hamas's strategy of violence. Since Abu Mazen has already ruled out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a military confrontation with the Islamists, converting Hamas into a more legitimate political opposition—like Islamists in Jordan, for instance—might be Abbas's best option, and one Hamas pragmatists appear willing to consider.

In fact, said Susser, Israel should view Hamas's political evolution as a domestic Palestinian matter. "It won't impact Sharon's decision to disengage from the Palestinians, because Sharon is determined to disengage whether he has a partner for it or not," Susser told me. In the long run, he said, a political understanding between Hamas and Fatah is preferable to an internal confrontation because it would promote stability in the West Bank and Gaza—stability that will undoubtedly make disengagement easier. "I would say that whatever leads to the strengthening of Palestinian institutions ... serves a Palestinian interest and ultimately an Israeli interest," Susser said. Even, perhaps, if Islamists end up helping govern some of those institutions. ■

Why Inauguration Day is dangerous.

Unprepared

BY NORMAN J. ORNSTEIN

TRAVELING AROUND BOSTON, Massachusetts, during the Democratic convention last summer wasn't easy. Fearing a terrorist attack, the Secret Service had ordered the closure of 40 miles of roads around the FleetCenter, where the convention was held, and 3,000 police were on duty to guard the site. The security measures taken during the Republican convention in New York City were even more extreme, with 10,000 police—many clad in riot gear—patrolling the streets immediately surrounding Madison Square Garden, seven police helicopters hovering overhead, and 26 police launches patrolling the Hudson and East rivers. There were stories everywhere about the potential threat to the conventions, leading the two parties to develop their own contingency plans. And, once the conventions passed without incident, federal and state officials began fretting over how to secure the nation's 193,000 polling places on November 2. After all, a presidential election seemed like a logical target for terrorists aiming to disrupt or devastate U.S. democracy.

Now consider the upcoming Inauguration Day on January 20. Washington, D.C. and the Department of Homeland Security plan to beef up security for the inauguration ceremony itself. But there has been almost no public discussion of the issue. I trust the security specialists have done what they can to prevent an attack. But I know that next to nothing has been done to minimize the disruption that will follow if there is an attack.

At noon that day, as specified in the Constitution, the president and vice president will be sworn in for four years in the White House. Over many decades, it has become a singular event, with a ceremony on the west front of the Capitol attended by thousands of people and televised to hundreds of millions around the world. Every second of the inaugural ceremony—from the entrance of the president to the benediction and the swearing-in by the chief justice—is carefully choreographed by a joint panel of congressional leaders. The inaugural address is one of the most significant speeches a president makes. The whole spectacle is a celebration of our democracy.

It is also the single most vulnerable moment for our constitutional system—far more dangerous than either the conventions or the general election. Gathered on the west front terrace at the same time are the president and vice president (as well as the outgoing president and vice president in some years), the entire Supreme Court, the congressional leadership and most of the members of the House and Senate, the incoming Cabinet, and a slew of other dignitaries and high government officials.

Here is the nightmare scenario: Right at noon, a suitcase nuclear bomb goes off somewhere on the Mall—a bomb small enough to fit in a satchel but powerful enough to devastate six to ten square city blocks, or most of the area between the Capitol and the White House. (Such a bomb could easily wreak havoc even if outside the zone of protection contemplated by security authorities this year.)

The result would be mass chaos in Washington. There is no president to be sworn in at noon. The Presidential Succession Act of 1947 says that, after the president and vice president, next in line is the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, followed by the president pro tempore of the Senate, followed by the Cabinet in order of the creation of each office. But there is no vice president, speaker, or president pro tempore; all are dead. This year, when some of President Bush's Cabinet secretaries are continuing on in the next administration, one of them might survive and be able to serve as president. But what if that weren't the case? And what would happen if an attack occurred during a year in which a new president assumed office? Who would be president then?

THERE WOULD BE many contenders, each eager, à la Al Haig, to be "helpful" by stepping into the vacuum to bring stability, including military leaders, surviving members of Congress, and maybe even outgoing Cabinet members who have forgotten to submit their letters of resignation—or at least who say they have. The House, if there were one, could appoint a new speaker. But the Constitution says that, to conduct any official business, the House must have a quorum of 218 of its 435 members. Since the Civil War, tradition has modified

Norman J. Ornstein is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the quorum requirement to include half of the living members, so if any members of Congress have survived the attack, they could band together and select a new speaker—who would then become president for the next four years. That could conceivably be done by a handful of representatives—if even three survived, two could make a quorum, choose a speaker and, thus, a president. But, if there is no way of determining for some time whether other members of Congress are still alive, the tiny quorum would be potentially unconstitutional. And who would serve as president in the meantime?

All these questions—Whose claims to be next in line prevail? When can a reduced Congress meet and make decisions under extreme conditions?—could normally be resolved by the Supreme Court. But all the justices, or at least enough to eliminate the statutory quorum requirement for the court of six justices, are gone under this scenario. The 13 federal courts of appeals would still be in existence (or, at least, all except perhaps the Washington, D.C. Circuit), but no method exists for making one of them, or some other body, the alternate Supreme Court if needed.

Of course, even if the handful of lawmakers choosing a president under these circumstances were somehow deemed legitimate, the new president could well be radically different in ideology from the deceased president-elect, thus reversing the will of the voters for a full four years; imagine, for example, if a Speaker Bernie Sanders came to replace Bush, or if Tom DeLay replaced a future incoming liberal Democrat.

Doomsday scenarios like this have been the stuff of science fiction and Tom Clancy novels. But now they are no longer fanciful or virtually impossible. Suitcase-size nuclear bombs exist and are supposedly being sought by terrorist operations.

WHAT NEEDS TO be done? First, we need to be sure we can quickly reconstitute a representative and a functional Congress to prevent the specter of months of martial law and to make sure that a democratic body can resolve disputes over power or legitimacy that might be triggered by the disaster. To do so requires a constitutional amendment to provide for emergency interim appointments to the House in the event that a catastrophe kills many of its members, and such appointments for both houses if a large number are incapacitated or missing, making a quorum of living members impossible.

Second, Congress and the White House need to revamp the presidential succession process to make sure that some figure from outside Washington is in line. A full reconsideration of the Presidential Succession Act of 1947 would remove members of Congress (the speaker of the House and president pro tempore of the Senate) from the line. Most constitutional scholars believe that it is unconstitutional for members of the legislative branch to be eligible for succession, which the Constitution limits to "officers" of the United States, meaning executive branch officials. Constitutional or not, it is simply unwise to allow the possibility of a speaker from a party different than that of the president-elect to assume the White House, or to have a senator high up in the line of succession whose main qualification for being president pro tempore is longevity (think Strom Thurmond).

Third, Congress and Bush should adopt an informal process for 2008 and any future instance when there is a change of administration, whereby the outgoing president nominates, on behalf of the president-elect, one or more of his or her Cabinet choices in December or early January, allowing the Senate to hold hearings and then vote to confirm the new Cabinet secretaries by the morning of January 20, with enough time for at least one of the secretaries to leave Washington by noon. Then, if there is a disaster at the inaugural, there is a clear alternative in the line of succession ready to step in with full legitimacy.

Fourth, we need an alternative Supreme Court in the event that our existing one is wiped out. The obvious solution is to allow for the creation of a temporary Supreme Court consisting of the chief judges of the 13 appeals courts, along with any surviving Supreme Court justices, whenever the Supreme Court drops to four or fewer members.

SO WHICH OF these steps has been taken? None. Just as real and frightening as the prospect of doomsday is the lack of planning by our elected officials in the three-plus years since September 11 to cushion against the chaos such an event would trigger. With the exception of a handful of members of the House and Senate, in the three years since September 11, both Congress and the Bush White House have reacted to this doomsday threat with yawns or annoyance that anyone would even mention the potential risk.

Why? Focusing on issues like these is like writing a will. It forces people to contemplate their own mortality and the difficult issues associated with it. Without leadership forcing lawmakers to take on these questions, rank-and-file members can easily rationalize doing nothing. And that is what they have done. Neither Speaker Dennis Hastert nor Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist has made any of these issues a priority. In the House, Hastert has been intimidated by Judiciary Committee Chair James Sensenbrenner, who opposes allowing emergency interim appointments on the grounds that the House should keep its tradition of selecting members only through elections (even if the alternative is no functioning House). And Congress has become only more complacent as the time without a terrorist attack on the United States has stretched beyond three years.

Homeland security, military, and Washington, law enforcement officials have put in place unprecedented security measures for this January 20. God willing, there will be no incident, and Bush and the country will have another wonderful demonstration of democracy in action. But that will not erase the threats to future inaugurations or to the larger vulnerabilities of our government in an age of terrorism. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bush's fake tax reform.

Bait And ...

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

ONE OF THE great episodes in the lives of policy wonks everywhere—and, let's face it, they don't have many—occurred when Ronald Reagan signed the Tax Reform Act of 1986. It was an almost shockingly beneficent piece of legislation, lauded by economists and political scientists across the ideological spectrum. It did not, however, happen without a fight. Passing tax reform—which lowered tax rates and cleansed the tax code of countless loopholes, credits, and other acts of unjustifiable favoritism—forced Reagan and his allies to fight for nearly two years against an army of K Street lobbyists seeking to preserve their clients' privileges. It was a rare moment when the GOP's principles smacked up against the interests of its donors, and principle won.

The battle was chronicled by *Wall Street Journal* reporters Jeffrey Birnbaum and Alan Murray in the classic book *Showdown at Gucci Gulch*. The book records not only the ultimate triumph of reform but also the times when it seemed that lobbyists would kill it. One such moment is captured in a passage that has particular relevance today:

> On April 10, the [Senate Finance] committee adopted a crazy-quilt depreciation system that ostensibly gave more generous write-offs for machinery and equipment that were used in "productive" purposes than those that were not. This dubious distinction was the invention of lobbyists Charles Walker and Ernest Christian and their heavy-industry allies in the Carlton Group that represented major rubber, steel, aluminum, and petroleum producers. The system, in fact, was largely a ruse to mask the committee members' frenzy to aid the industries they were beholden to.

What makes this particular episode relevant is that the ironically named Ernest Christian has been popping up in the news lately. Two years ago, the old tax lobbyist formulated a strategy, called Five Easy Pieces, for overhauling the tax code in five steps. White House staffers took to the proposal, and, with some slight adjustments, the Bush administration has adopted it as its approach to overhauling the tax code. "Christian and [GOP strategist Grover] Norquist say they believe the White House has signed on to the incremental approach of the Five Easy Pieces, and may even be pursuing them in order," reported *National Journal* two years ago. *The Washington Post* echoed in 2003, "Placed against the tax cuts of the past three years, Christian's agenda is beginning to look like a road map."

The Five Easy Pieces strategy postulates that the long-time conservative goal of a sweepingly radical tax overhaul, such as replacing the income tax with a flat tax or a national sales tax, runs too much political risk. Instead, Christian has argued, conservatives can achieve the same goal by doing five things: cutting marginal tax rates, eliminating taxes on capital gains and dividends, allowing more generous treatment of business investment, doing away with the estate tax, and establishing tax-free personal savings accounts. The three major Bush tax cuts to date have achieved the first four pieces, partially or completely.

Two days after winning reelection, President Bush told a press conference, "We must reform our complicated and outdated tax code" and told reporters that "tax reform" was an issue on which he intended to spend his "political capital." It has since emerged that Bush intends to appoint a commission whose recommendations he will try to enact in 2006. But the thrust of his plan is already clear. He hopes to lock his prior tax cuts permanently into place and use his second term to enact tax-free personal savings accounts, the final element of Five Easy Pieces. These steps, taken together, would indeed radically transform the tax code by rendering virtually all investment income tax-free. With capital virtually exempt from taxation, the burden of supporting the federal government would fall almost entirely on labor. It would amount to a reversal of the principles of progressive taxation that have held sway for the last century. And it has very little to do with what most people mean by "tax reform."

BUSH'S PLAN TO complete this transformation has been widely described by its proponents and outside observers as "tax reform," and it has been compared in the press to Reagan's 1986 effort. But Bush's goal is different from—and, in many ways, the opposite of—tax reform. The fact that Reagan's tax reform entailed a death struggle against tax lobbyists, and that Bush's "tax reform" strategy was literally *devised by* a tax lobbyist, is merely one clue.

The remarkable thing about the 1986 tax reform law is that it put into practice purely academic notions of how public policy ought to work. Economists agree that the most efficient income tax would treat all kinds of income equally, rather than giving lower rates to certain kinds of income, or exempting those businesses that use political clout to gain special treatment.

By the mid-'80s, the tax code had grown thick with differential treatment. Tax breaks for real-estate investment,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for instance, had spurred massive construction of unneeded office buildings. By taking advantage of special tax breaks, the developers could make money even if the buildings sat empty. It was like those factories in the old Soviet bloc pumping out products that nobody wanted to buy. That's what happens when government regulation, rather than market demand, dictates investment.

On top of the costs to economic efficiency, the tax code was also an affront to simple fairness. Two different families earning the same level of income could pay vastly different tax rates simply because one had certain categories of income (such as capital gains) deemed more favorable, and therefore taxed at lower rates, by Washington. Corporations faced even wider disparities. Some businesses paid the top statutory rate of 45.6 percent, while many others avoided taxation altogether. A corporation's tax rate depended to an enormous degree on how much influence its lobbyists wielded in the Capitol.

Fairness and economic principle alone were not, of course, enough to bring the Reagan administration to champion tax reform. Several other factors came together. Reagan's reelection campaign, fearing that Democrats would seize upon inequities in the tax code as a campaign issue in 1984, preemptively announced that Treasury Secretary Don Regan would head a commission on tax reform that would announce its findings after the election.

Most people, including most Republicans, figured Regan's study would go nowhere. But Regan took his task seriously and persuaded the administration to back it. Tax reform gave Reagan the chance for a huge second-term accomplishment. The appeal of tax reform is that, by eliminating great swaths of special privilege, it could at once slash tax rates (the top rate fell from 50 to 28 percent) while shifting a greater share of the tax burden onto the affluent. Republicans liked the first part, Democrats liked the second. Facing massive deficits, the White House knew it could win large rate cuts only if it paid for them by closing loopholes.

Due to the superficial similarities—tax-cutting Republican presidents facing huge deficits and seeking a second-term legacy—some Washingtonians have suggested that Bush may follow in Reagan's footsteps. "No sooner had Bush claimed victory than he was promising to push ahead with still-undefined plans to reform and simplify the tax code, as Ronald Reagan did during his second term," reported *The Washington Post* shortly after the election. But there is a crucial difference: Reagan's administration had a number of influential moderates—Regan, James Baker, Richard Darman—while Bush's does not. Some of them, like Baker, were mere pragmatists, caring more about winning legislative victories than their ideological content. Others, like Regan, were motivated by an actual desire to bring fairness to the tax code. *President Reagan*, Lou Cannon's definitive biography, describes Regan stoking the president's righteous anger against the unfairness of the tax code. "The tax system we now have," he told Reagan, according to Cannon, "is designed to make the avoidance of taxes easy for the rich and has the effect of making it almost impossible for people who work for wages and salaries to do the same."

Reagan is remembered as a radical conservative with close ties to business, and that was certainly true by the standards of his day. Yet the conservative revolution he ushered in was still in its infancy. The then-moderate GOP establishment was strong enough to wield major influence over his policies. The Reagan White House had a close relationship with the business lobby, but not the sort of iron-clad alliance that exists today. And Reagan did not automatically dismiss outside criticism as liberal media carping. In 1984, Robert McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice released a study showing that 128 out of 250 large, profitable companies had paid no federal income tax in at least one of the previous three years. At least some Reaganites found that embarrassing. "You could shame Reagan's people," recalls McIntyre. "The Bushies have no sense of shame."

It has become difficult to find Bush supporters who even approve of Reagan's tax reform, let alone harbor any desire to repeat it. In a recent *National Review* article, Ramesh Ponnuru explicated the current conservative position. The 1986 tax reform was "a major setback for conservatives," he wrote. "Congress adopted the liberal definition of tax reform, and broadened the tax base to include things it should not have included. ... For most of the subsequent two decades, conservatives have been trying to undo the policy damages wrought by those two changes."

SO HOW HAVE Bush and his supporters managed to pass off their position as "tax reform"? One reason is that they have exploited a somewhat obscure but crucial conceptual misunderstanding.

Bush's supporters claim that his present and future tax cuts, taken together, would bring about a consumption tax. "With each incremental change to the tax code that Bush has put in place, or has proposed, we take another leap toward a flat-rate consumption tax system. I call this Bush's stealth flat-tax plan," gloated Republican activist Stephen Moore in *The Weekly Standard* last year. And mainstream reporters have taken the same view. "Many Republicans and some of his campaign advisers view his call as one that would replace the income tax with a system that would basically tax personal consumption, effectively eliminating levies on investment and savings," reported *The New York Times*.

Framing Bush's plan this way has lent it a certain credibility among policy elites. Most economists agree that a consumption tax, if properly executed, would do a somewhat better job than an income tax of cultivating economic growth. An income tax taxes how much you earn, whether through wages or through savings (rent, stock portfolios, et cetera). A consumption tax taxes only the income that you consume. Economists believe this could improve growth by encouraging people to save more, which would lead to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more investment capital. The trouble is that Bush's goal of exempting investment income from taxation would not actually result in a consumption tax. It would result in something far worse.

A consumption tax requires a tax not only on wages but also, indirectly, on existing capital. Under an income tax, you pay taxes on the income you earn from your savings, but you don't pay any tax when you consume those savings. A consumption tax does the reverse: You pay nothing on the income you earn from your savings, but you do pay a tax when you try to consume it.

Switching from an income tax to a consumption tax would effectively impose a huge double tax on all existing capital assets. Suppose that the government replaced the income tax with a national sales tax, which is one kind of consumption tax. Now imagine you have a bank account that has been earning interest. Under the old system, you had to pay taxes on the interest you earned on those savings. With a national sales tax, though, you would have to pay taxes again when you pulled the money out of the bank and spent it on a new car.

The reason existing assets get hit twice is that they are caught in the switch. Under an income tax, they get taxed on the front end. Under a consumption tax, they would get taxed on the back end. The savings that exist at the time of the switch would get taxed at both ends, while future savings would avoid this penalty.

That may sound unfair. And, to some extent, it is. But the unfairness, in a way, is exactly the reason economists like it. Taxes impose the least drag on the economy when they do as little as possible to change people's behavior. One way to design an efficient tax is to concentrate on taxing things that people can't, or are reluctant, to change. This can be unjust. Economists suggest that a poll tax, where every citizen pays a fixed sum, would be highly efficient—the only way to avoid it is death, which most people find highly undesirable—though brutally unfair.

Switching from an income tax to a consumption tax would work for a similar reason. It penalizes people who have saved money in the past. That's where the efficiency comes from: It punishes behavior that can't be changed (in this case, because it has already happened). As Brookings Institution economists William Gale and Peter Orszag wrote in a recent *Tax Notes* paper, "A key finding in academic analysis is that almost all of the economic benefit from moving to a consumption tax derives from the one-time tax it places on existing assets."

The one-time tax on existing assets is not only the most economically efficient part of a consumption tax, it is also the one part that most hurts the wealthy. (The underlying principle here being the well-known fact that wealthy people have more money than poor people.) It may, therefore, not come as a complete surprise that Bush's plan omits this feature entirely. Bush's plan doesn't impose a onetime tax on existing assets. Instead, he would leave the structure of the income tax in place, but exempt virtually all investment income from taxation. The government would tax wage income that is consumed, but it would not tax savings income that is consumed. That's not a consumption tax, that's what economists call a wage tax. And the same academic analyses that find a consumption tax better than an income tax at promoting growth also find that a wage tax would be worse than an income tax at doing the same. Bush's plan, in other words, is the worst of all worlds: a pie that grows more slowly and is sliced up less equitably.

As Gale and Orszag write, "[T]he system that emerges from the Bush tax cuts has many of the worst features of both the previously existing tax system and a fundamentally reformed system. The tax cuts will generate none of the potential growth effects of fundamental reform, and in fact will reduce long-term economic growth."

Bush's effort to transform the income tax into a wage tax will harm the tax code because it is reverse tax reform: Rather than broadening the base of income subject to taxation, it narrows it. This forces higher tax rates on wage income. (Eventually, anyway—in the meantime, it means further deficit spending.) Bush's plans amount to massive loopholes for investment income. Conservatives argue that they are merely removing a "double tax" on income that has already been levied at the corporate level. But the corporate income tax has itself been whittled away to the point where it resembles Swiss cheese that is more hole than cheese. Corporate tax revenues have dropped from 4.1 percent of Gross Domestic Product in 1960 to 1.3 percent today. With the estate tax slated for extinction, capital gains and dividend taxes slashed, and Bush proposing huge new tax-free savings vehicles, most investment income will never be taxed *at all*.

There is, therefore, something almost comically naïve about the speculation that Bush is planning to embark upon Reagan-style tax reform. "Bush's second term does appear to be a ripe time for tax reform," reported the *Post* a few weeks after the election. "Corporate tax revenue, measured against the size of the economy, has fallen to levels not seen since 1983, in part due to the proliferation of new loopholes and offshore tax havens." From the perspective of the Bush administration, of course, the decline in corporate taxation is exactly what they're aiming for. As the techies like to put it, it's a feature, not a bug.

A fundamental misunderstanding of Bush's intentions also underscores the fanciful notion that Democrats might, or ought to, cooperate with him. (The week after the election, the normally astute *Los Angeles Times* Washington correspondent Ron Brownstein opined on CNN, "Tax reform may be one [area] where there may be some bipartisan cooperation; it's a less ideological issue.") Of course, Democrats would have an obligation to join hands with Bush if the president wanted genuine tax reform: closing loopholes and preferences, lowering rates, and preserving the progressive nature of the tax code. But, in Bush's GOP, the earnest tax reformers have long since been eclipsed in influence by the Ernest Christians. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Flying and Fighting

MARTIN SCORSESE IS unique in American film, and not just because of his talent. Though he is only in his early sixties, he has made to date some forty films, but that hasn't been enough for him. He has become a figure in film, a mover and shaker. He works in film-preservation groups, he edits a series of film books, he aids festivals. To put it bluntly and melodramatically, which is an apt Scorsese union, he wants to give his life to films. When I watch him in television interviews, of which there is no shortage, his machine-gun speech usually makes me a bit nervous: he always seems to be straining to keep up with his enthusiasms.

THE AVIATOR
(Miramax)

MILLION DOLLAR BABY
(Warner Bros.)

The center of his film life is of course his directing, and the persistent subtext in his career has been the quest for a masterwork. Not every director, not even every good one, seems so obsessed and driven to achieve a landmark work as Scorsese is, works such as Coppola (to name an Italian-American contemporary) created in *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*. Scorsese has made his share of consciously lesser works, but over and over he has reached for a masterpiece. Not yet, however. *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Gangs of New York*: all were obviously made by a dynamic talent, yet they don't quite lodge at the top.

Now Scorsese has made another bid for Parnassus, but once again he rises only to somewhere on the slope. **THE AVIATOR** deals with (part of) the life of Howard Hughes, and it is patent that Scorsese thought that, at least as far as he goes with the life, it has the lineaments of Charles Foster Kane: tremendous drive, giant abilities, luscious wielding of power, tugs of ego—a marriage of magnitude and hubris, exemplary of our time.

Scorsese virtually signals his model with the opening shot, a reminder of an early sequence in *Citizen Kane*. Hughes, a boy of ten or so, is bathed by his mother, who, while she washes him, is also trying to shape his mind. Then Scorsese plunges ahead with a battery of devices and techniques that he long ago inherited from Welles and uses here with confidence and verve—sudden cuts, camera sweeps into a scene, camera sweeps back out of it, camera angles that keep us alert: a cinematic effusion that weaves a texture out of time and money and hustle.

The story leaps to 1927, when Hughes (his early oil days skipped) is already in Hollywood, already the owner of a studio, and immersed in the making of *Hell's Angels*, a project that merges his imagination and profligacy and passion for aviation. He also has an unflagging passion for women, of whom we see a few who were film stars: Jean Harlow, Katharine Hepburn, Faith Domergue, and Jane Russell among them. (Russell starred in a Hughes Western called *The Outlaw* that was set in the Grand Tetons, not Wyoming's but hers. A story at the time was that, with his engineering skill, Hughes had designed a bra for her so effective that the censors wouldn't let it be used.)

The screenplay, by John Logan, includes much that is interesting about Hughes's airplane designs and aviation achievements. He set records for transcontinental and around-the-world flights, and he also juggled corporate maneuvers with the founding of TWA and its rivalry with Pan Am. Not all his ventures were successes, but he was so daring and visionary—all the while he was carrying on at least one caloric love affair—that he became an incarnation of the American boy's fantasies. What more could be dreamed of in kids' bedrooms across the land?

But that incarnation shriveled. In some way, not psychologically developed here, Mother Hughes's early warnings about cleanliness became a neurosis in Hughes—e.g., his refusal to touch doorknobs in men's rooms—and this oddity soon waxed into an eremitical mania that safeguarded him from pollution. He kept relatively sane long enough to recognize that the arrival of the jet engine was (the film's last line) "the way of the future." The rest of his life, more clinical than dramatic, is omitted.

Some comments on this film have complained of a central hollowness. I agree but locate it differently. This same film, shot for shot, line for line, could have been much more solid and engrossing, much farther up the Parnassian slope, with a better actor as Hughes. Leonardo DiCaprio, who worked very few miracles for Scorsese in *Gangs of New York*, was nonetheless cast as Hughes. The reason, his box-office clout, is almost embarrassingly obvious through the first half of the picture, because DiCaprio's lack of talent is glaring. It is as if he were playing Hughes in a school play. Hughes's eventual madness is a gift to DiCaprio: it helps him to deepen his portrayal. Still, *The Aviator* suffers from its leading actor almost as much as *Alexander* does.

Cate Blanchett—attractive woman, capable actress—plays Katharine Hepburn, which is less a role than a straitjacket. All Blanchett can do is imitate, something that is more the work of a night-club comic than an actress. Alec Baldwin is meaty as Juan Trippe, the head of Pan Am, and Alan Alda provides subtlety and wile as Trippe's stooge, Senator Ralph Owen Brewster. The cinematographer is Robert Richardson, usually more subtle than he is here: he uses a lot of picture-postcard colors, possibly because Scorsese wanted to fix the film visually in the past.

Clint Eastwood has apparently reached a point in his career where he can do no wrong. He directed *Mystic River*, a creaky and pretentious murder story, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dostoevsky was asked to move over and make room for it. Now Eastwood produces, directs, and stars in **MILLION DOLLAR BABY**, a boxing film that is wildly hailed though it fairly fills the theater with the odor of the mothballs in which the script has been stored. A hopeful young fighter approaches a grizzled trainer; the trainer declines to take on the newcomer; but eventually he does, and eventually success arrives. The film even has the old black sidekick for the trainer, a man who knows a lot about the sport and serves as the trainer's conscience. The only differences between this new film and its many forebears are that the young hopeful is a woman and the finish is unforeseen.

The casting matter here is just the reverse of *The Aviator*. DiCaprio maims his film; but Eastwood saves his—for many, anyway. Whatever his talents may be, he has through the years added a *person* to the screen world; sage, slim, laconic, reliable. If we can watch this picture at all, it is because this universally admired person is in it. Hilary Swank, who seems to me to have too many teeth for a boxer, tries hard and sincerely. Morgan Freeman humbles himself to play the knowledgeable old sidekick.

I almost forgot one other point that distinguishes this film from past fight pictures. This trainer reads Yeats. ■

Christine Stansell
What Stuff!

THE INTIMATE WORLD OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
By C. A. Tripp
Edited by Lewis Gannett
(Free Press, 343 pp., $27)

JUST ABOUT EVERYONE HAS CLAIMED Lincoln at one time or another—Republicans, Democrats, Christians, freethinkers, integrationists, segregationists. It is not surprising that someone else with a feeling of possession would step forward. But gay? Abraham Lincoln? How would you ever know? And why would you ever care? Surely there is no president whose sexuality we less want to think about. Reverence for the man is so deep that at times it borders on beatification. Somehow, you would be more willing to think about William McKinley's intimate life, or even Calvin Coolidge's.

Yet the virtue of this little book is to get you wondering. The late C. A. Tripp, a clinical therapist and popular writer on homosexuality, became fascinated with the question in the early 1990s and embarked on a long, obsessive quest through the minutiae of the massive biographical record on Lincoln to prove his theory. That was the decade that saw gay history flourishing in the academy, producing some sophisticated and influential interpretations. Tripp was drawn not to those works but rather to an older mode, which might be called posthumous outing. Instead of charting the development of homosexual subcultures or the impact of McCarthyism on American gays or the distinctions between homosexual acts (which have been around forever) and a full-blown gay identity (which is a relatively recent phenomenon), Tripp was determined to rescue a hidden gay hero.

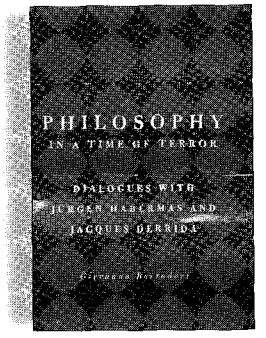
He had plenty of material to search. In the manner of all bookish nineteenth-century people, Lincoln produced a huge corpus of writing, private and public. Letter-writing was the medium for ordinary life, as political writing and oratory would later be the expressions of political genius. He wrote letters constantly and profusely. His correspondents held on to them as they did to anyone's letters, tied into packets as tokens of relationships still alive or mementos of those now defunct in what was already, by the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a society of tremendous mobility.

Once Lincoln became important, these materials became all the more precious and made their way into archives and biographies. Later a cottage industry of reminiscence developed. Political cronies, old friends, and passing acquain-

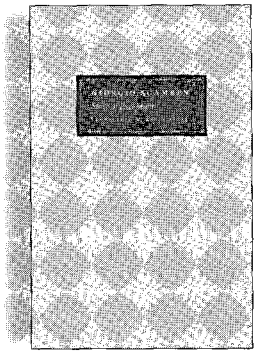
Christine Stansell is a professor of history at Princeton. She is writing a book on the history of feminism.

Philosophy in Action

NEW BOOKS FROM CHICAGO



Philosophy in a Time of Terror
Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida
Giovanna Borradori
"Giovanna Borradori . . . who experienced 9/11 as a New Yorker 50 blocks from ground zero and believes in the 'scholarly interview' as an important form, aims straight at the top. In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, she nervily places the microphone before Europe's two most famous living philosophers—Germany's Jürgen Habermas and France's Jacques Derrida—and grills them on 9/11 and related events."
—Carlin Romano, *Philadelphia Inquirer*
Paper $15.00



State of Exception
Giorgio Agamben
"A timely and compelling inquiry into the capacity of state power to withdraw the guarantees of legal protection and entitlement, at once abandoning its subjects to the violent whims of law and intensifying state power. . . . Agamben deftly considers the historical and philosophical implications of this power. . . . This is an erudite and provocative book that calls for us to 'stop the machine' and break the violent hold that law lays upon life."—Judith Butler
Paper $12.00

Available in bookstores
The University of Chicago Press
www.press.uchicago.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tances published their recollections. The first biographer, Lincoln's law partner William Herndon, started to collect details of the life on the day of the funeral and did not stop for twenty-five years.

Yet Herndon, having spent a quarter-century on an excavation as exhaustive as an archaeological dig, concluded that Lincoln was essentially unknowable. The massive corpus of facts stood, in the end, before "a profound mystery—an enigma—a sphinx—a riddle ... incommunicative—silent—reticent—secretive—having profound policies—and well laid—deeply studied plans." The "profound mystery" was a conceit of the time in this age of Egyptology and Orientalism (Herndon published his *Life of Lincoln* in 1889) as well as a self-aggrandizing device with which the bosom friend and unmatched fact-collector fended off rivals. But the legend of Lincoln the enigma proved durable, winding its way down through the early twentieth century and turning biographers into gumshoes bent on cracking the case. Did the death of his first love, Ann Rutledge, really break his heart? Was he clinically depressed?

Modern historians have found less to puzzle over, perhaps because their questions are larger. We still may not know the full story of Lincoln's feelings for Ann Rutledge, or whether he really did split rails. But his evolution from garden-variety political hack into the Great Emancipator now seems of a piece with the development of anti-slavery politics and the wrenching changes brought about by secession and war. The man was magnificent, a genius, but he was of his time, not above his time: a leader who concentrated within himself every available social and cultural resource to face a cataclysm and envision something beyond it. The transformation of the wise-cracking, melancholy country politico into the author of the Second Inaugural, the canny commander-in-chief, and the "Marse Linkum" beloved of the freed-people now seems not so much an enigma as a miracle born of a specific historical alchemy.

Aubade

On a dead street
in a high wall
a wooden gate
I don't recall

ever seeing open
is today
and I who happen
to pass this way

in passing glimpse
a garden lit
by dark lamps
at the heart of it.

BILL COYLE

[redacted]

But *The Intimate World* returns to the older realm of mystery. Tripp picks up the esprit of those earlier gumshoe researchers: unencumbered by the inhibitions of their day, he sees himself picking up hastily discarded clues—once too hot to handle—and venturing down paths where they were loath to tread. Like those blindered police detectives in a mystery who are too dim-witted or corruptible to pursue their leads, his predecessors are the foils against which Tripp sets himself up as the daring historian-detective who defies orthodox procedure. And what Tripp finds is a man living in a closet. The biographers, he insists, knew it all along, or could have known it, and covered it up.

Chief among the culprits is the folksy Carl Sandburg, author of one of the twentieth century's most popular biographies of Lincoln, who in 1924 alluded gently to the man's "streaks of lavender and spots soft as May violets." Tripp flogs the passage for a confession of intent, making much of the proximity of the lavender and violets to Sandburg's mention of Lincoln's "tough physical shanks and large sockets" and "loins and tissues." There is indeed something odd and significant about the remark, although Tripp doesn't notice; Sandburg, who was writing in the 1920s, would have been well aware of the language of "pansies" and the color code of purple already widely disseminated in his own city of Chicago, where there was a thriving gay scene. Tripp also makes much of Sandburg's conclusion to the book's preface: "month by month in stacks and bundles of fact and legend, I found invisible companionships that surprised me." Invisible companionships? Was Sandburg, writing at the far end of living knowledge of the man, dropping a broad hint?

The case for Lincoln's same-sex love, those "invisible companionships," rests mainly on his relations with two men: Joshua Speed, his housemate for four years in Illinois, and David V. Derickson, a middle-aged captain in the president's bodyguard. Tripp leads with the Derickson "affair": its curiosities are less easily explained away and it has received short shrift from previous writers—omitted, passed over, or, if Tripp is right, hidden away. The muckraking journalist Ida Tarbell, who followed Herndon's book a few years later with one of her own, dug up Derickson's reminiscences from his obscure hometown Pennsylvania newspaper in 1888. Derickson's story was in most ways a familiar tale of Lincoln's kindly intimacies, democratic manners, love of talk and company. But there is an added intensity to his portrait of the president.

Lincoln apparently took to Derickson from the moment they met. He became a fixture in the president's daily routine, breakfasting with him, gallivanting around Washington in the official carriage, and at the end of the day accompanying him back to the summer White House, the family's cottage on the grounds of the Soldiers' Home five miles out of town. Lincoln introduced him to the top brass, surprising some of the mighty, he noted coyly, when the president presented the humble captain to generals on well-nigh equal terms. Lincoln explained the military situation to him, read aloud telegrams from field commanders, and confided his perplexities about affairs of state. When Lincoln went out to walk with little Tad, it was Derickson, and Derickson alone, who accompanied them.

One could minimize this Forrest Gump–ish yarn of a simple man's importance to the great if it were not for a gratuitous—and thus more reliable—recollection buried in an obscure history of his Pennsylvania regiment, written by one Thomas Chamberlin, who served during the war as Derickson's commanding officer. In chronicling the regiment's duties in Washington, Chamberlin, too, tapped the broad vein of recollections of Lincoln's homey felicities. Lincoln was easy and genial with the men, he recounted, so much so that one of them, Derickson, became a constant companion, even spending the night with the president in the same bed when Mrs. Lincoln was gone: "it is said," Chamberlin remarked jauntily, "—making use of his Excellency's night-shirt!"

In 1895, when Chamberlin published the account, the exclamation would have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been taken as a mark of comic incongruity. But a much earlier source—this one a Washington political wife's diary of 1862—tilts toward scandal, not silliness. "Tish says," this woman wrote, referring to the socialite Letitia McKean, " 'there is a Bucktail soldier here devoted to the president, drives with him, and when Mrs. L. is not home, sleeps with him.' What stuff!" Onto the stuff Tripp piles more stuff: Lincoln countermanded an order to transfer the company; Mary Lincoln absented herself from home just when Lincoln was getting close to the captain; Derickson supposedly had the real lowdown on whether or not Lincoln ever split rails. It is flimsy, but then there is that matter of sharing the bed.

As for Joshua Speed, Lincoln met him in 1837, when he moved from New Salem, Illinois to the state capital of Springfield. Lincoln was a penniless first-term legislator. Speed was proprietor of the general store. In his long-after-the-fact recollection, lightning struck the day he spotted the lanky down-at-the-heels customer who came in to buy a bed. "I have a large room with a double bed up-stairs, which you are very welcome to share with me," Speed recalled in the gimcracky vernacular, replete with verbatim dialogue, that is common to Lincoln reminiscences. " 'Up-stairs,' said I, pointing to a pair of winding stairs.... He took his saddle-bags on his arm, went up stairs, set them down on the floor, and came down with the most changed countenance. Beaming with pleasure he exclaimed, 'Well, Speed, I am moved!' " Lincoln stayed at Speed's for four years.

Whether they actually remained in the same room and the same bed is not clear—Tripp assumes they did. But they certainly became close friends, privy to each other's family affairs, longings, courtships, and love lives. Speed introduced Lincoln to Mary Todd, the daughter of a prosperous Kentucky merchant who was staying in Springfield with her married sister. It was, in worldly terms, an auspicious match for a country boy, but neither party entered into it without ambivalence. Speed was Lincoln's close confidant throughout an engagement marked by Lincoln's doubts and the Todd family's disapproval. Speed, in turn, confided his worries about his own imminent marriage. The men wrote loving letters to each other long after they went their separate ways, sometimes admonitory, sometimes peeved, sometimes wistful, but always tender. Their intimacy and their lasting feeling for each other serve for Tripp as illustrations of a fundamental erotic stratagem: "how bisexual men often support each other's heterosexual efforts in a spirit of being helpful, yet also as a way to stay close by and fully informed of every move."

Tripp habitually falls back on such supposed eternal verities about homosexuality. The propositions allow him to infer helter-skelter, wrenching the evidence in line to make the case. Thus a letter from Speed to Lincoln that lacks any personal content is interpreted as an ingenious cover-up: "it is precisely this kind of impersonal recounting of some irrelevant bit of news that is often resorted to by distraught lovers who are contending with some strain." Speed's profuse sentimental testimony of love for his bride masks his true feelings for Lincoln: the professions of feeling were "a highly suspect move in view of what is well understood in sex research ... from one whose heterosexual commitment was shaky from the outset." The

insights A NEW MUSEUM SERIES

Leading physicians, scientists, bioethicists, and social commentators reflect on the Museum's latest exhibition, *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race,* and its relevance to our time.

DOING GOOD: THE PROMISE AND PERILS OF SCIENCE

The Nazis drew on the science of their day in their pursuit of "perfection" and the creation of the "master race."

Dr. Ruth Faden, Director of the Phoebe R. Berman Bioethics Institute at Johns Hopkins University and the daughter of Holocaust survivors, explores the implications of this history in light of current medical innovations to enhance appearance and intelligence or prevent disease.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13 • 7 P.M.

FUTURE *INSIGHTS* PROGRAMS

February 10 • **Leon Wieseltier,** Literary Editor, *The New Republic*

March 17 • **Leon Kass,** Chairman, President's Council on Bioethics

April 12 • **Arthur Caplan,** Director, Center for Bioethics, University of Pennsylvania

Admission is free, but seating is limited. For reservations, call 202.488.0407.

For reservations at future *Insights* programs, please e-mail special_events@ushmm.org.

***Deadly Medicine* will be open before and following the program.**

Doors open at 6 p.m.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

100 Raoul Wallenberg Pl., SW | Washington, DC 20024 | www.ushmm.org | Metro: Smithsonian

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hard fact that Speed himself sometimes took pains to put the relationship into perspective—as a friendship between two single men—also serves as proof of a cover-up: "his basic mode of defense was not only to act as if he and Lincoln were less close than they really were, but to send people like Herndon down the wrong path whenever possible."

TRIPP EMERGES AS A CURIOUS figure in his own book: hectoring and overbearing, yet somehow appealing in his wacky tendentiousness. It turns out that he was a close friend of Alfred Kinsey. He became a convert to the Kinsey project after reading the master's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. James H. Jones's life of Kinsey recounts a maniacally empirical Kinsey moment in which Tripp was the principal mover. Kinsey's data had led him to believe that the urology literature was incorrect in assuming that the male orgasm consisted of "dribbling" rather than "squirting." To settle the dispute, Kinsey decided to film two thousand men—a standard big-picture Kinsey sample—masturbating to climax.

But where to get the subjects? Enter Tripp, who knew the New York gay scene and volunteered to set up the experiment. He enlisted the help of a beautiful boy hustler. The prostitute would be paid for every man he recruited, and each volunteer would also make two dollars. On the night scheduled for filming, the line stretched around the block. When the photographer panicked because his carpet would be ruined, Tripp cheerfully put down sheets. The films showed that most of the two thousand dribbled rather than squirted. And a Kinseyan elation over an empirical point nailed down—eureka!—no matter how extraneous to the human venture, erotic or anything else, still resonates in Tripp's book.

The Kinseyan conception of sexuality is most evident in Tripp's treatment of Lincoln's boyhood. Lincoln's gawkiness before he reached the age of ten, Tripp insists, signaled an early puberty, which Kinsey "proved" inclined boys toward homosexual experiences: "the boy who becomes adolescent at 10 or 11 has not had as many years to build up inhibitions against sexual activity." The point is elaborated at great length, bolstered by Kinsey's graphs and by contemporaneous testimonies to Lincoln's awkwardness around girls. Tripp couples the puberty argument to Lincoln's often recounted love of raunchy jokes and stories. The smoking gun is a doggerel parody "found on the road" in Lincoln's neighborhood in 1829 and attributed to the twenty-year-old local scholar and wit: the poem concerns two boys who marry and produce a "jelly baby," a slang term for the imagined results of homosexual intercourse. "Something significant is gained from seeing the connections between Lincoln's basic biology ... and a sex-mindedness that dominated his sense of humor and much of his life," Tripp concludes.

Tripp possesses enough historical training to know that evidence cannot be taken at face value, but he usually takes that principle as license to beat the sources for the confession that he is seeking. The third degree is glaring when he goes after each of the reminiscences that anchor the Derickson case and the Speed case. These sources are recollections, with the reorderings and rearrangements that memories entail. Both Speed and Derickson maximized the significance of the events that they described—if in fact those events did occur. Did Lincoln really talk over "the business of the day" with Derickson? Perhaps he did, in an age when the line between officialdom and private life was permeable, when the president received couriers in his bedroom, and (early in the war) still traveled around the capital unguarded and mulled over the difficulties of the war with many visitors.

Or perhaps the events themselves were a fabrication or a distortion of moments long past and, if the truth be told, only faintly remembered. This possibility occurs only in passing to Tripp, who takes the recollections as documentary truth. Thus he sees Speed's 1884 account of meeting Lincoln as a telltale event full of "sticking points" that indicate immediate erotic attraction—"On close examination the sexual implications become unmistakable.... Within moments of Lincoln arriving on that borrowed horse Joshua Speed evidently targeted him as a desirable bed partner"—as if Speed were reporting from a time-traveling capsule.

IF LINCOLN WAS GAY, WHAT ABOUT the women in his life? Tripp joins others in dismissing the tale of Lincoln's lost love for Ann Rutledge, who died in 1835, as a fabrication originating with Herndon, who was looking for romance to embellish the frontier years. He is then left with the rather more substantial fact of Lincoln's marriage. Here the book shifts from obsessive investigation to slashing denunciation, with a portrayal of Mary Todd Lincoln and family life at the White House that sounds like the Arkansas state troopers' version of the Clintons. Mary Todd Lincoln certainly was known to everyone as a difficult, temperamental, and troubled woman (but also, on occasion, as charming). She was not blessed with extraordinary powers to transmute either her mistakes or her sufferings into something larger; and she had an abundance of both.

It is not necessary to sentimentalize the woman to see that she endured much. A Southern newcomer to a wartime capital, she lived essentially alone. She tried to invent a role for herself as official hostess, but ran up against Washington society's disdain for a backwoods outsider. She fended off rumors that she was a Confederate spy, worried about her large Confederate family and many male relatives who were Confederate officers, and fretted—not incorrectly, it turned out—about her husband's safety. Most important, she lost her twelve-year-old son Willie to illness in 1862, the second of her four adored children to die. (Eddie died in 1850.) So if, the next year, Tripp has her acting like a crazy woman in a public incident when she felt she was pushed out of the official limelight by a woman of lesser rank, a more understanding writer might have suggested some reasons why. Instead Tripp portrays her as a harpy and a shrew, avaricious, cunning, mean, vengeful, and parasitic on her husband's good nature and high position. The rendition is not just dumb and sexist, it is also sneering and misogynist.

The problem with scorning historical method, as Tripp does here and everywhere, is not that he gets things wrong. In fact, he is often a stickler for facts—or at least the ones he likes. The problem is that he is so ungenerous, so small-minded. The compulsive quest for the "truth" of Lincoln's homosexuality blinds him to the great expanses of life that lie outside his exceedingly straitened notion of sex. The nadir comes in the chapter on Lincoln and religion, where he ponders the contradictions between Lincoln's early freethinking impulses and the magnificent cadences of the Second Inaugural, steeped in Calvinist conceptions of a vengeful God. "What in the world could have made such a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

change in Lincoln's mind and outlook ... from the mildness of His image in 1862 to this angry Almighty less than three years later?" he queries. Could it have been the deaths of more than six hundred thousand Americans, along with that of his favorite child?

IN HIS VERY NAÏVETÉ, HOWEVER, Tripp compiles a dossier of ambiguities—not truths, but ambiguities—worth considering. He wants to trumpet the unassailable truth of Lincoln's homosexuality—or, in his more nuanced moments, what he implies to be bisexuality. His bullish proclamations are easily countered, and not just by the heterosexists and the homophobes whose attacks he predicts will result from his revelations. But he puts forward some oddities. Too insubstantial in themselves to prove anything about Lincoln, they do add to a larger body of evidence concerning sex before sexuality—that is, bodily life before the advent of the modern notion of an all-encompassing state that lies at the core of identity.

It mostly comes down to this: what did it really mean for people to sleep together in small beds? The practice was habitual, a convention of friendship and comradeship. Travelers piled in with each other at inns; siblings routinely shared beds; women friends often slept with each other as readily on an overnight visit as they took their tea together in the kitchen—and sometimes displaced husbands to do so. Civil War soldiers "spooned" for comfort and warmth (and Civil War re-enactors now do the same for accuracy's sake). Nursemaids might sleep with their small charges to keep them company and keep them quiet.

Historians who care about such things argue about them. Some insist that it is anachronistic to read back our own post-Freudian assumptions into an age when eros was more contained; and that the evidence tells us that it was masturbation, not same-sex contact, that was the real taboo. Victorian women's frequent expressions of longing for lips, hands, and kisses signify, in this reading, permissiveness for a range of sensuous experience that lay outside the genital contact we now define as sex.

The view has a tinge of the old 1960s celebration of the polymorphous perverse: sex was more playful, more fun, when it was less focused. Especially in terms of the history of women, this interpretation has the advantage of specifying some distinctly female response to a sexual culture that was largely male-defined and still inextricably tied to procreation. For women, sensuality may well have been more alluring than genital sexuality in a culture in which sex was not so much something a man and a woman did with each other as something a man did to a woman. But even for men, bodily intimacy surely had broader connotations than we give it today.

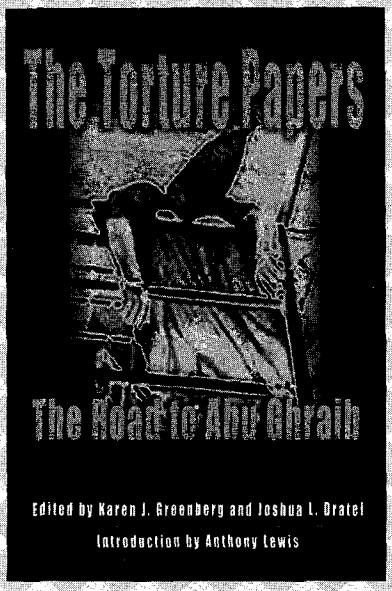
There are also historians who cannot let go of the possibility that at least some people did in bed exactly what people have always done in bed. It is due to them that we now pretty much accept that Walt Whitman, when he wrote in his day journals about his encounters with men in New York in the 1850s, was speaking of something palpably sexual: "Dec 28 [1861]—Saturday night Mike Ellis—wandering at the cor of Lexington av. & 32d st.—took him home to 150 37th street,—4th story back room.... Thursday evening April 17th '62 The hour or two with Henry W. Moore, evening, in Broadway, walking up—and in Bleecker street.—the brief 15 minutes, night July 18th '62." There was a time when this interpretation of the great poet was treated as clumsy and obsessive—ridiculous to portray the artist of "Leaves of Grass" and Lincoln's magnificent elegist in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" as a wildly, even obscenely sexual gay man cruising and screwing in random crevices of New York. Yet by now the image of Whitman as sexual adventurer and world-class hustler has immeasurably enriched both our understanding of nineteenth-century New York and our reading of his poetry. Try reading the wonderful "City of Eros" after dipping into Whitman's journals, which chart his meetings with strange men with the assiduity that nineteenth-century farmers devoted to recording daily weather conditions and crop yields.

As for Lincoln, what was he doing in bed with Captain Derickson? Tripp has him growing up in a backcountry Midwest where raunchy jokes were made about men screwing men. It is possible that in a society where genital sex was understood as an essentially male matter—penetration and climax—some might have engaged furtively in mutual masturbation or even penetration in a rough, no-nonsense, practical sort of way: a homespun American version of the ethos of the English public school. Sailors did just this; and it was this kind of sex that a young Southern aristocrat spoke of

CAMBRIDGE

THE DEFINITIVE BOOK OF RECORD

"*The Torture Papers* may well be the most important and damning set of documents exposing U.S. Government lawlessness ever published. Each page tells the story of U.S. leaders consciously willing to ignore the fundamental projections that guarantee all of us our humanity. I fear for our future. **Read these pages and weep for our country**, the rule of law and victims of torture everywhere."
— *Michael Ratner, President Center for Constitutional Rights*



The Torture Papers
The Road to Abu Ghraib

Edited by Karen J. Greenberg,
Center on Law and Security,
New York University School of Law
Joshua L. Dratel,
Guantanamo Detainee Defense Attorney
Introduction by Anthony Lewis

www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in 1826 (to his chum James Hammond, the future secessionist) as "poking and punching a writhing Bedfellow with your long fleshen pole—the exquisite touches of which I have often had the honor of feeling." Tripp suggests another variant: "femoral intercourse," or rubbing up against someone else's leg.

Lincoln was certainly no Whitman, poking and punching about with the best of them; nor was he, in the Southerner's manner, an arrogant and rapacious rake. But he was, like the great majority of nineteenth-century men, most comfortable with other men. Both Derickson and Speed would have fit into the Whitman scheme of "camerados" whose ties made up the American *demos*. The sole fact of those male affinities did not make Lincoln homosexual in the sense that Tripp wants. He married a woman whom he seems to have loved and created a family that was a mainstay of his life. He had much on his mind, to say the least, besides the biological quivering that Tripp equates with homosexual love. Finally we have only conjecture amplified by conjecture; and finally it doesn't matter much. Still, it's what gets you through the night. If Captain Derickson helped the grieving father and the burdened president, we should only be grateful. ■

Wyatt Mason

Swann's Ways

Adventures in literary translation.

I.

LET'S NOT KID OURSELVES: everyone hates translations. The evidence is everywhere in the history of literature. Cervantes wrote that reading a translation was "like looking at the Flanders tapestries from behind: although you can see the basic shapes, they are so filled with threads that you cannot fathom their original luster." Goethe took issue with translators themselves, whom he likened to "enthusiastic matchmakers singing the praises of some half-naked young beauty: they awaken in us an irresistible urge to see the real thing with our own eyes." Gide observed that the translator was "a horseman who tries to put his steed through paces for which it is not built." Madame de Lafayette equated the translator with "a lackey whose mistress sends him to pay someone a compliment; whatever she said politely, he renders rude." And Milan Kundera sketched a portrait of the translator as good-natured dope, the shaggy dog of letters panting at his author's heels:

> I meet my translator, a man who knows no Czech.
> —Then how did you translate it?
> —With my heart.
> And he pulls a photo of me from his wallet. He was so congenial that I actually believed it was possible to translate by some telepathy of the heart.

Sentimental, low-born, and bumbling; their work misleading, unclear, and crude: translators—the consensus would suggest—are in the business of turning gold into lead.

Although the extremity of this disregard may surprise us, its origin is no mystery. Consider the Hebrew Scriptures and their promulgation. In various accounts that proliferated before the time of Christ, it was made abundantly clear that to tamper with the Law in any manner was to risk retribution of Old Testament proportions:

> Theodektes, one of the tragic poets ... when he was about to adapt some of the incidents recorded in the law for one of his plays ... was affected with cataract in both his eyes. And when he perceived the reason why the misfortune had befallen him, he prayed to God for many days and was afterwards restored.

In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus, an early father of the Christian church, explained how the first translators of the Scriptures into Greek managed to avoid blindness, or worse. Ptolemy, a king of Egypt during the third century B.C.E., wished to expand the holdings of the Library of Alexandria. Learning that it did not boast a copy of the Laws of the Jews, the king prevailed upon the people of Jerusalem to provide him with a Greek translation. They consented, sending "seventy of their elders, who were thoroughly skilled in the Scriptures and in both the languages." Upon the arrival of the translators in Ptolemy's court, the king is said to have split them up "fearing lest they might perchance, by taking counsel together, conceal the truth in the Scriptures." He commanded each to undertake the identical project, in isolation. Unable to consult one another, each prepared a separate translation. And yet:

> When they came together in the same place before Ptolemy, and each of them compared his own interpreta-

SWANN'S WAY
By Marcel Proust
Translated by Lydia Davis
(Viking, 468 pp., $27.95)

IN THE SHADOW OF YOUNG GIRLS IN FLOWER
By Marcel Proust
Translated by James Grieve
(Viking, 557 pp., $27.95)

THE GUERMANTES WAY
By Marcel Proust
Translated by Mark Treharne
(Viking, 619 pp., $29.95)

SODOM AND GOMORRAH
By Marcel Proust
Translated by John Sturrock
(Viking, 557 pp., $29.95)

THE PRISONER and THE FUGITIVE
By Marcel Proust
Translated by Carol Clark and Peter Collier
(Penguin Classics, 720 pp., £8.99)

FINDING TIME AGAIN
By Marcel Proust
Translated by Ian Patterson
(Penguin Classics, 400 pp., £8.99)

Wyatt Mason is currently translating Montaigne's ESSAYS. *His translation of Dante's* VITA NUOVA *will be published next year.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> tion with that of every other, God was indeed glorified, and the Scriptures were acknowledged as truly divine. For all of them read out the common translation [which they had prepared] in the very same words and the very same names, from beginning to end.

Irenaeus would have us understand that the Greek translation was, very literally, faithful. Called the Septuagint after its translators (from the Latin word for seventy, *septuaginta*), it became the cornerstone text of the early Christian church. Its authority could not be questioned. Its authorship was not up for debate.

Ever since, absent a chorus of angels singing out identical lines, the authority of our translations has been questioned. Most often, these inquiries are answered swiftly and without remedy. Think of Jerome, who gave us the first Latin Bible. When he began, he worked from the Greek Septuagint. But soon he was checking it against the older Hebrew sources. The Roman clergy were not pleased when he ended up translating most of the Old Testament from Hebrew, nor were they delighted by his decision to translate into the everyday Latin of Romans—certainly not the language of God. So Jerome was forced to flee Rome and complete his translation—the Vulgate—in Bethlehem.

A different kind of exile awaited the man responsible for the first English Bible. John Wycliffe, in the fourteenth century, had believed that the Good Book should be written in a tongue comprehensible to his countrymen. The Anglican church was so happy with his efforts that its officers dug up his corpse and burned his bones for heresy. As Henry Knighton, a fourteenth-century Leicester canon, put it:

> [Wycliffe] translated out of the Latin into the Anglican tongue, not the Angelic tongue.... Thus, the Gospel pearl is cast forth and trodden under foot of swine, and what was dear to both clergy and laity is now made a subject of common jest to both, and the jewel of the clergy is turned into the sport of the laity.

Not long after, William York Tyndale's translation of the Bible appeared. Arriving just as the revolution in printing was sweeping the Continent, Tyndale's edition became the first English Bible to achieve wide distribution. But the church, too, had managed to accelerate its work. Tyndale did not have to await the grave to hear charges of heresy. He was sentenced to death: first strangled and then, for good measure, burned at the stake. His last words were "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

In 1611, Tyndale's prayers were answered. A Bible commissioned by England's King James I and authorized by the Church of England finally appeared. The results were eye-opening indeed:

> In the beginning was the word, and the word was at God, and God was the word.
> —Wycliffe, 1384

> In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God: and the word was God.
> —Tyndale, 1530

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
> —King James Version, 1611

II.

SIXTY-THREE YEARS AGO, VLADIMIR Nabokov, newly arrived from occupied Paris, contributed an essay to this magazine that may be a read as a sermon. Full of fire and brimstone, "The Art of Translation" knows heresy when it sees it:

> Three grades of evil can be discerned in the queer world of verbal transmigration. The first, and lesser one, comprises obvious errors due to ignorance or misguided knowledge. This is mere human frailty and thus excusable. The next step to Hell is taken by the translator who intentionally skips words or passages that he does not bother to understand or that might seem obscure or obscene to vaguely imagined readers.... The third, and worst, degree of turpitude is reached when a masterpiece is planished and patted into such a shape, vilely beautified in such a fashion as to conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public. This is a crime, to be punished by the stocks as plagiarists were in the shoebuckle days.

Although Nabokov maintained a lifelong indifference "to religion, to the church—any church," the language here, we cannot ignore, is biblically tuned. Errors of inattention or beautification are "evil," "turpitude" for which one goes to "Hell" to be "punished." No less zealously than Bible translators of yore, Nabokov believed in the sanctity of authorship, a belief that can be traced back to his infancy. "I was bilingual as a baby (Russian and English)," Nabokov said in a late interview, "and added French at five years of age." Throughout his childhood and youth, he read a range of authors in their original languages: Verne, Wells, Poe, Browning, Keats, Flaubert, Rimbaud, Chekhov, Tolstoy. Armed with such polylinguality, it would not be long before Nabokov turned to translation.

His first practical opportunity came when he was twenty. Nabokov and his father, Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, were discussing the French Nobel laureate Romain Rolland, whose latest novel, *Colas Breugnon*, had been rendered in a Rabelaisian mode meant to evoke the flavor of the sixteenth century. Nabokov's father commented that such an abundant style—full of wordplay and musical effects—would present any contemporary translator with considerable difficulty. The remark sparked the tinder of the son's early ambition: Nabokov bet his father that he could translate it into Russian prose while "preserving rhythm and rhyme." The stakes of their wager are lost to history, but its outcome was altogether clear. *Colas Breugnon*, rechristened *Nikolka Persik*, won good reviews that garnered its translator more work.

Soon after Nabokov graduated from Cambridge in 1922 and moved to Berlin, he was approached by a publisher in need of a tricky translation. Pocketing the American five-dollar bill he was offered as an advance, Nabokov agreed to translate *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian. As he had with *Colas*, Nabokov strove to reproduce *Alice*'s singsong prose, its rhythms and rhymes. For the benefit of those of us unable to read *Anya v strane chudes*, or *Anya in the Land of Wonder*, the translator's wife Véra would explain half a century later that her husband had worked hard to impersonate Carroll's "tricks of demeanor and speech." Puns and portmanteaus that would have been deadly if translated literally were liberally recast. Details of British history sure to baffle Russians were replaced with local color: the "French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror" became a mouse left behind during Napoleon's retreat. Now considered the finest of the seventy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

substitute *Alices* that have proliferated throughout the reading world, the twenty-three-year-old Nabokov's translation showed him already exceptionally able at acting "the real author's part."

Twenty years later, once the Reich swept across Europe and Nabokov had emigrated to America, his belief in liberal translation would undergo a radical conversion. It began during his first New York winter, in 1940–1941. His days spent beneath painted clouds among the heads-down hordes in the main reading room of the New York Public Library, Nabokov began to research and write the lectures on European writers that he would recite in various American universities over the next eighteen years. "He later estimated," wrote his biographer Brian Boyd of those days at the library, "that he prepared perhaps a hundred lectures, at about twenty pages per hour, or about two thousand pages in all. Never, he wrote to friends, had he had to work so hard."

ONE CAN SEE THE STRAIN OF those preparations in the margins of the classroom copies of the books from which Nabokov would teach during the next two decades. In these translations of the European classics that he knew so well in their originals, endless words and phrases are struck through by a tireless, fault-finding pen. Look at his copy, for example, of an early translation of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Nabokov has very nearly interlineated the entirety of the text with alternate wordings of the translator's lines. One can file the corrections neatly into the three classes of evil he would enumerate in his sermon from this magazine. He amends errors of ignorance: "The old charwoman calls him 'dung beetle' (not 'cockroach' as in this idiotic translation)." He restitutes words the translator has skipped ("rain could be heard falling on the panes" becomes "rain drops could be heard striking the tin of the sill's outer border"). And he explains the motive behind homely renovations he makes to vilely beautified phrases: "There is a wonderful flowing rhythm here in these dreamy sequences of sentences. He is half-awake—he realizes his plight without surprise, with a childish acceptance of it, and at the same time he still clings to human memories, human experiences."

Nabokov, too, was realizing his plight. As he waded deeper into the translated texts upon which his mythic "hundred lectures" would be based, all the old translation bets were off. Back in Berlin in the 1920s, when he had bet his father he could preserve rhythm and rhyme, he had been bringing home new news from the world. Now, in America, he saw that old news from home had preceded him here, and been garbled in the process. And so onto the leaves of Constance Garnett's translation of *Anna Karenina* he incised: "A complete disaster this translation. Perhaps still worse than the translation of *Bovary*." And in the C. K. Scott Moncrieff translation of *Swann's Way*, after bathing page after page in the blue blood of an editorial pen, we see Nabokov—having lost all patience for the vilely beautified, all tolerance for infidelity—write: "This translator is *insane*." (These citations appear courtesy of the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, and previously unpublished marginalia are quoted by arrangement with the Estate of Vladimir Nabokov, all rights reserved.)

Nabokov went compos mentis. Yes, in 1942, there was a collaboration with Edmund Wilson, this magazine's erstwhile literary editor, on a translation of Pushkin's verse-drama *Mozart and Salieri*. And sure, in 1945, a few stanzas of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, billed as "rhymed paraphrases," ran in the *Russian Review*. But that was it. Where *Colas* and *Alice* had been liberally reinvented, Nabokov's translation of Lermontov's *A Hero for Our Time*, in 1958, would be literal. So too 1960's *The Song of Igor's Campaign: An Epic of the Twelfth Century*. And then there was his rendition in 1964 of *Eugene Onegin*—a project that took Nabokov over a decade to complete (more time than he devoted to any three of his seventeen novels). Nabokov believed it would be one of the two works (the other being *Lolita*) for which he would be remembered.

Lolita has become canonical, but Nabokov's *Onegin* has become a curio. The damning criticism with which it was met rose to a pitch not heard since the Reformation inveighed against Tyndale. Writing for *The New York Review of Books* in 1965, Nabokov's former friend and collaborator Edmund Wilson rendered Olympian judgment. He tossed Nabokov's translation onto the pyre, watched it burn, fanned the flames, and then, giddy with remorse, stomped on its ashes:

> One knows Mr. Nabokov's virtuosity in juggling with the English language, the prettiness and wit of his verbal inventions. One knows also the perversity of his tricks to startle or stick pins in the reader; and one suspects that his perversity here has been exercised in curbing his brilliance; that—with his sadomasochistic Dostoevskian tendencies so acutely noted by Sartre—he seeks to torture both the reader and himself by flattening Pushkin out and denying to his own powers the scope for their full play . . . passages sound like the products of those computers which are supposed to translate Russian into English . . . when he tries to translate *Onegin* "literally," what he writes is not always really English.

The shift in Nabokov's ambition from early liberalism to a late literalism seemed to Wilson incomprehensibly perverse, an act no less "insane" than those Nabokov witnessed between his teaching covers. And yet the explanation for this so-called curbing of his brilliance involves neither torture nor denial. It was much more mundane, certainly more human. The young man who had translated liberally had been doing so with his readers very much in mind, or at least with one reader foremost in his thoughts: his father. This fact need not be plumbed for pseudo-psychological resonance: reduced to its essence, the act of translation had been undertaken to bring pleasure to readers. Whereas four decades later, fighting a war of words on the margins, the act of translation was undertaken to bring justice to writers. The charge—fidelity—was the same in both eras. Only its polarity had changed.

III.

HIGH ON THE LIST OF THE writers who would present grave peril to translators is certainly Marcel Proust. Considered one of the supreme stylists of twentieth-century French literature, Proust wrote in beautifully balanced, carefully cadenced prose, the elegance of which has long been understood as a central feature of his accomplishment. It has also been viewed as the chief impediment to the appreciation of that achievement, whether in French or in any of the dozens of languages into which his work has been passed.

Proust's style is built on deferral and qualification. The declarative is often

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

undercut by the ruminative, and the ruminative transformed into the metaphorical. Just as metaphor transfers the relationship of one set of objects to another, Proust's prose is always shuttling us between the literal and the figurative, the direct and the indirect, in the hope that the incoherent itch will find relief through the salve of articulation, and by articulation attain the cure of truth. Consider a characteristic passage:

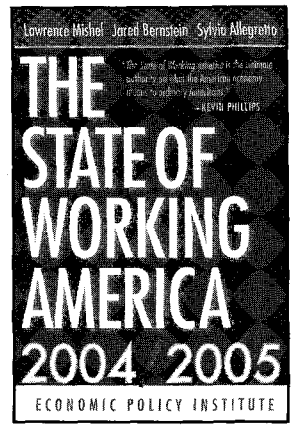
> Had my parents allowed me, when I read a book, to pay a visit to the country it described, I should have felt that I was making an enormous advance towards the ultimate conquest of truth. For even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immovable prison; rather do we seem to be borne away with it, and perpetually struggling to pass beyond it, to break out into the world, with a perpetual discouragement as we hear endlessly, all around us, that unvarying sound which is no echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within. We try to discover in things, endeared to us on that account, the spiritual glamour which we ourselves have cast upon them; we are disillusioned, and learn that they are in themselves barren and devoid of the charm which they owed, in our minds, to the association of certain ideas; sometimes we mobilize all our spiritual forces in a glittering array so as to influence and subjugate other human beings who, as we very well know, are situated outside ourselves, where we can never reach them. And so, if I always imagined the woman I loved as in a setting of whatever places I most longed, at the time, to visit; if in my secret longings it was she who attracted me to them, who opened to me the gate of an unknown world, that was not by the mere hazard of a simple association of thoughts; no, it was because my dreams of travel and of love were only moments—which I isolate artificially today as though I were cutting sections, at different heights, in a jet of water, rainbow-flashing but seemingly without flow or motion—were only drops in a single, undeviating, irresistible outrush of all the forces of my life.

Truth: found in a book; sought in the world; recognized as self; isolated in a work of art. Proust's movements of mind in the passage that I have cited are rendered in the rented English of Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff. A decorated infantry captain in World War I, Moncrieff fought in the Scottish regiment known as the King's Own Scottish Borderers (famed for wearing red roses rung around their helmets while in battle). A soldier's fortitude was quite appropriate to the long march through Proust's text, and roses in the translator's helmet worth our keeping in mind. When Moncrieff returned from the war, he worked at the *Times Literary Supplement* and, the story goes, during lunch hours rendered our first English Proust.

Though not without flowery embellishment: in the passage above, Moncrieff has made many additions to the original French. Perhaps, given the deeper linguistic reserves upon which an English-language writer may draw for descriptive color, Moncrieff merely wished to take good advantage and make our view more scenic. Thus Proust's "*la conquete*" (conquest) becomes an "ultimate conquest"; his "*entouré*" (surrounded) becomes "enveloped in, surrounded by"; "*immobile*" (motionless) becomes "fixed and immovable"; "*pour agir sur*" (to effect) becomes "to influence and subjugate"; and "*immobile*," used a second time, now becomes "without flow or motion."

THERE ARE SEVERAL THINGS TO be said about these sorts of additions, which are a consistent feature of Moncrieff's work. First, upon reading the paragraph in English above without consulting the French (which I had not read in a decade and do not carry around in my head), I can tell you that I didn't bat an eye. I found Moncrieff's version neither infelicitous nor unclear. Still, reading the French, one cannot argue the fact that Moncrieff's choices frequently are amplifications of Proust's prose. Although Moncrieff's English, taken on its own terms, is certainly attractive and clear, his consistent departures from the original French do serve to inform Nabokov's marginal "This translator is *insane*." One might not agree with such an extreme assessment, but one could well understand why, in the interim since Moncrieff's version was first published, his work has seen revision by two separate editors with versions that vie for our marketplace dollars and reading-chair hours.

THE STATE OF WORKING AMERICA



BY LAWRENCE MISHEL, JARED BERNSTEIN & SYLVIA ALLEGRETTO

"...the most comprehensive independent analysis of the U.S. labor market."
— FINANCIAL TIMES

An Economic Policy Institute book
Published by
Cornell University Press

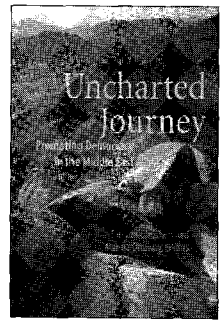
ORDER AT EPINET.ORG
OR CALL 1-800-EPI-4844

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT
for International Peace

NEW

UNCHARTED JOURNEY: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East

Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, Editors



"... an extremely timely and important volume—a dispassionate, incisive, and practical analysis of the opportunities and pitfalls of Western democracy promotion in the Middle East. Highly recommended..."
—**Francis Fukuyama**

January 2005 / c. 300 pp.
$24.95 / paper: 0-87003-211-9
$50.00 / cloth: 0-87003-212-7

To read an excerpt, visit
www.CarnegieEndowment.org/Journey

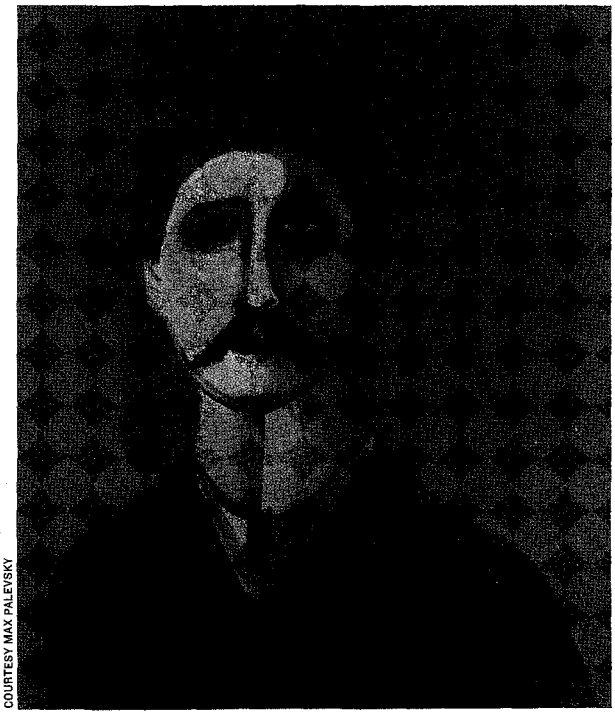
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Terence Kilmartin, whose edition (the silver one) of Proust's novel appeared in 1981, meant it to manifest two classes of improvement over Moncrieff's original. He wanted to bring the English text into congruence with the corrected French text that was published in 1954 (Samuel Beckett, in 1931, wrote that the first French edition was "abominable"); and he wanted to make adjustments to Moncrieff's prose style, albeit cautiously. As Kilmartin wrote: "I have refrained from officious tinkering for its own sake, but a translator's loyalty is to the original author, and in trying to be faithful to Proust's meaning and tone of voice I have been obliged, here and there, to make extensive alterations."

"Here and there" is the key phrase. For in the five examples I gave above of Moncrieff's amplifications—which, I am sure, one could safely file under matters of "tone" rather than "officious tinkering"—Kilmartin lets stand four. One should not conclude from my isolated example that Kilmartin's edition is not valuable or does not offer improvements; it is and it does. Still, as Kilmartin was the first to say, and with great graciousness, his revised edition is fundamentally Moncrieff's, albeit with gentle, useful, and inconsistent amendments.

The competing corrected edition (the beige one), prepared by D. J. Enright ten years later and called by Enright a "re-revision," was based on the Kilmartin text (to which Enright served as editor), but with adjustments that reflect the publication of a second, corrected French text published between 1987 and 1989. Enright, who undertook the revision to Kilmartin's edition after that editor's death, makes adjustments that reflect current French scholarly consensus, which "both adds, chiefly in the form of drafts and variants, and relocates material: not always helpfully from the viewpoint of the common (as distinct from specialist) reader, who may be surprised to encounter virtually the same passage in two different locations when there was doubt as to where Proust would finally have placed it."

Enright makes very few stylistic emendations. With Kilmartin, he agrees that, in the passage I quoted earlier, four-fifths of Moncrieff's amplifications should be allowed to stand. The most obvious difference between these two editions, then, is their titles. Kilmartin, following Moncrieff, and apparently under duress from his publisher, kept the name by which the novel had achieved fame: *Remembrance of Things Past*—a title the flowery translator plucked from Shakespeare's sonnets. For his edition, Enright elected to employ the more literally accurate and now canonical *In Search of Lost Time*. (It is worth noting, though, that this version too is not infallibly literal, not really: Proust's word "*recherche*" is, in French fashion, characteristically pregnant with possibilities. It means both "search" and "pursuit," but, equally, contains shades of "inquiry," "research," and even "refinement.")



COURTESY MAX PALEVSKY

RICHARD LINDNER, *Marcel Proust*, 1950

Competing translations of a literary text are nothing new. Proust, who began his writerly activity as a translator of Ruskin (working from English trots that his mother prepared to supplement her son's negligible knowledge of the language), was well aware of the allegiances that form around a translation, no matter how supposedly flawed. Midway through the *Sodom and Gomorrah* portion of his novel, Proust's narrator returns home, where he has an exchange with his mother that involves two editions of the *Arabian Nights*:

> As in the old days at Combray, when she gave me books for my name day, so as to make it a surprise, my mother sent secretly for both Galland's *Arabian Nights* and Mardrus's *Arabian Nights*. But having cast an eye over the two translations, my mother would certainly have wanted me to stick to that by Galland, while being afraid to influence me on account of the respect she had for intellectual freedom, of a fear of intervening clumsily in the life of my mind.

Antoine Galland's twelve-volume translation in 1704 of the group of medieval tales that he called *Les Mille et une Nuits* was the first made into French, or into any European language. It was an instant best-seller, bringing fame to its translator and a wide readership to a charming literature that previously had been unknown to the West. When J. C. Mardrus's new translation in sixteen volumes arrived in 1899, sporting the different title *Les Mille Nuits et une Nuit*, it also featured the subtitle "literal and complete." The "literal" referred to the new scholarly consensus which held that, though lyrical, Galland's translation was often inaccurate. The "complete" referred to Mardrus's inclusion of erotic material that Galland had suppressed. Still, more correct doesn't mean better loved, as Proust's narrator explains. His mother "had been revolted by the immorality of the subject-matter and the coarseness of the expression" in the Mardrus version. The narrator could imagine the fuss his grandmother would have made "on seeing the title of her *Arabian Nights* deformed on the cover itself."

IV.

IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, Moncrieff was Galland to our Proust. Now, in the twenty-first, our Mardrus has appeared, gorgon-headed. The new Viking/Penguin *In Search of Lost Time*, which divides the novel among the hands of seven translators, has some critics worried. Robert Alter, one of our most dependable and perspicacious arbiters on matters of language in literature, has commented that "the idea of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entrusting one of the supreme French stylists to seven different English sensibilities is a strategy of desperation, but arguably an understandable one." For no single translator, in the eighty-three years since Proust died finishing his enormous book, has managed to complete, alone, a translation of this novel that undid even its maker. Not unreasonably, therefore, Alter strikes a cautious note, out of fear that seven translators will not manage to render a single, stylistically coherent Proust. And yet there is ample precedent for the practice of gang-translation.

When the fifty-four translators who prepared the King James Version of the Bible built their edition, they divided their membership into six "companies." Each company was given a portion of the Holy Book. "First Westminster Company" handled Genesis through 2 Kings; "First Cambridge Company" worked on 1 Chronicles through the Song of Solomon; and so forth. Although they worked alone, all followed a group of "Rules to Be Observed in the Translation of the Bible," drawn up in advance by the archbishop of Canterbury. These included instructions on what to do "When a word hath divers Significations" or "When any Place of special Obscurity is doubted," as well as commands that "No Marginal Notes at all to be affixed." The success of their method, and of their gambit, is impossible for a sensible person to refute.

The nature of that success was built on a fundamental accord among the participants. A similar accord would seem essential for the new Proust to succeed. As Lydia Davis, the lead translator for the Penguin Proust, explains in her "Note on the Translation," which accompanies the new volumes, a "face-to-face meeting" of the translators and their editor was held at the outset:

> we communicated with one another and with [editor] Christopher Prendergast by letter and e-mail. We agreed, often after lively debate, on certain practices that needed to be consistent from one volume to the next.... At the initial meeting ... those present had acknowledged that a degree of heterogeneity across the volumes was inevitable and perhaps even desirable, and that philosophical differences would exist among the translators. As they proceeded, therefore, the translators worked fairly independently, and decided for themselves how close their translations should be to the original—how many liberties, for instance, might be taken with the sanctity of Proust's long sentences.

It is interesting to wonder why Davis believes that a "perhaps even desirable" heterogeneity might serve such an endeavor, but her introduction does not provide an answer. Rather, in the British editions, series editor Christopher Prendergast offers the following justification of the benefits of unruly autonomy:

> [Proust exhibits a] shifting array of modes and registers across the individual volumes, from, say, Proust's version of the bucolic (in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*) to his version of the apocalyptic (in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*). One of the benefits of the division of labour entailed by a collective translation is that it arguably heightens the chances of bringing into focus the stylistic variety we encounter as we move from one volume to the next. A single translator, however flexible, is more likely to be constrained by the conscious or unconscious operation of a particular *parti pris*.

Whether we are ready to concede the point to Prendergast, there is certainly no arguing whether his seven approach their vocation with very different notions of its fundaments. Davis, who translates very closely, has since written about the eleven rules she found herself following when translating the first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*. Like those that governed the King James companies, hers were developed to impose internal consistency (albeit on her text alone).

Consider four of Davis's rules: "not to add any material that is not in the original ... not to subtract anything from the French ... not to normalize something that seems off at the moment ... retain the same order of elements in a sentence." James Grieve, translator of the second volume, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, has a very different methodology:

> In translating, it is sometimes necessary to edit. For example, the French

THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM

Our program, one of the oldest and most prestigious in the nation, is small (no more than a dozen students admitted in any genre, with all workshops limited to twelve members); very intensive (the Master's degree is ordinarily awarded after the academic year of eight courses); and highly competitive (normally twenty-five students apply for each spot in fiction and poetry). We are best known for the quality of our graduate workshops. All of these are held in the same small room, which allows through its dusty windows a glimpse of the Charles River. Perhaps the most remarkable such workshop occurred when Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and George Starbuck gathered for instruction by Robert Lowell—gathered, by the way, less often in that little room than at the Ritz Bar. These days, the poetry workshops are run by our regular faculty of Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky and Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, who also conducts the playwriting workshops; and those in fiction are led by Leslie Epstein, Ha Jin, and distinguished visiting writers. Of course, our students have about them the resources of a great university. That means they often take courses with a superb faculty in literature that includes, besides the poets Geoffrey Hill and Rosanna Warren, the scholar Christopher Ricks and Boston University's two other Nobel Prize winners, Saul Bellow and Elie Wiesel. It is difficult to know how best to measure a student's success, or the worth of a program to a writer; we can say that our graduates in each genre have accomplished a good deal. Among numerous awards, our playwrights can list The Heideman Award, The Charles MacArthur Award for "Best New Play," and six national playwriting awards from the American College Theater Festival. Quite recently, our graduates in poetry have won the $30,000 Whiting Award, the Barnard New Women Poets Series, a grant from the NEA, and the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America; there have been three winners in three years of the Discovery/*The Nation* Award, and two winners of the National Poetry Series. In fiction, our students have also won the Whiting Award, along with an inordinate share of the nationwide Henfield Awards. A few years ago, our writers swept every major literary award in the country, with Ha Jin winning the National Book Award and the PEN/Faulkner, and Jhumpa Lahiri the PEN/Hemingway and the Pulitzer Prize. Not a year goes by without a graduate of our program bringing out a book with a major publisher; and some, like Sue Miller and Arthur Golden, spend a good deal of time on best-seller lists. Over the last decade we have placed more than a score of our graduates in tenure-track positions at major American universities. We make, of course, no such assurances. Our only promise to those who join us is of a fair amount of time in that river-view room, time shared with other writers in a common, most difficult pursuit: the perfection of one's craft. For more information about the program, visiting writers, and financial aid (our teaching fellows conduct undergraduate creative writing classes), write to Director, Creative Writing Program, Boston University, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215 or visit our website at *www.bu.edu/writing/*. **Application deadline is March 1, 2005.**

Boston University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> has a strange parenthesis in "*la reine de (Naples)*": had I faithfully translated this, it would have given "the Queen of (Naples)"; rather than perplex my reader, I edit. Similarly, in a scene where Andrée is absent, she appears to speak. Or, rather, which character speaks the words "I've put up with her awful dishonesty for ages" is in French unclear; in English it must, I believe, be clarified.

Grieve is also at odds with Davis's rule regarding the retention of Proust's order of elements in his sentences. This is more significant. Grieve, who produced his own translation of *Du côté de chez Swann* twenty years ago, justified his project at the time this way:

> The idea of attempting a new English version of *Du côté de chez Swann* arose out of the dismay I felt on first reading the old Scott Moncrieff. This feeling was compounded by my discovery of the uniform mediocrity of other translations from French that came my way, and by the belief that translation was too important to be left to professionals.... I have tried to preserve [Proust's] combination of semantic clarity and syntactical complexity. My version may not please all readers; but if some of them judge that it comes closer to Proust, and to real English, than its competitors, they will please me.

WHERE DAVIS REFUSES TO add, subtract, or normalize, Grieve methodically does all three. Let us look, then, at how these philosophically varied approaches are reflected in translations of the same sentence by Davis, Grieve, and Moncrieff. (Kilmartin's and Enright's renderings are, not surprisingly, identical to Moncrieff's.)

Here is the original:

> *Un genre d'esprit comme celui de Brichot aurait été tenu pour stupidité pure dans la coterie où Swann avait passé sa jeunesse, bien qu'il soit compatible avec une intelligence réelle.*

And here are Moncrieff, Grieve, and then Davis:

> A sort of wit like Brichot's would have been regarded as out-and-out stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his early life, for all that it is quite compatible with real intelligence.

> The group among whom Swann had spent his youth would have considered Brichot's brand of wit to be painfully stupid (although it can be quite compatible with genuine intelligence).

> A wit like Brichot's would have been considered pure stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his youth, even though it might be compatible with real intelligence.

Some critics take at the comparison of versions of the same translated phrase with great verve; I do not. "The pleasure," wrote one hungry critic, "of going through any translation is to catch lapses," a statement, it seems to me, on a par with saying that the joy to be gained by scaling Everest may be measured by the number of frozen alpinists one finds as one climbs. If I do not subscribe to this sport, it is not out of squeamishness. I have become certain, when discussing translation, that there is little to be gained by such comparative exertions. For yes, if pressed, in the phrases above, we can see that Moncrieff and Co. are doing their amplification thing: Proust's "*pure*" ("pure") becomes their "out-and-out"; his "*compatible*" their "quite compatible." And sure, it is clear that Grieve, with great liberality, wants his version to come closer to "real English": rather than trotting behind the grammar of the French, he's Saxonizing. Object becomes subject: whereas in Proust's French "wit" is the subject that is held in objection by "the group," in Grieve's English "the group" is the subject that finds "wit" objectionable. Lastly, there's Davis's consistently literal version, which hews closely to French grammar and exact sense at every turn.

And yet, such philosophically different approaches noted, we must acknowledge that ultimately the differences they embody, however substantial, are not differences of substance: rather, of style. And in matters of style, if any more indisputably conveys the qualities of the original French, if any is unambiguously more *faithful*, wiser minds than mine will over similar matters disagree. Consider the reception of Peter Constantine's translation of Isaac Babel's *Complete Works*. Francine Prose, who does not read Russian but certainly is trustworthy on matters of English prose style, wrote that "the Constantine translation too often makes one feel that, on some basic level, Babel must not have been, after all, a very good writer.... No one could fault Constantine's command of Russian, but he appears to lack an ear for the grace of the English language. Oddly, he seems unaware that rhythm and cadence is as important in prose as in poetry." Whereas James Wood suggested in these pages about the same translation that "as far as the nonRussianist can tell, Peter Constantine's translation is extraordinary. There are very few writers one reads in translation with any kind of greed for style, but Babel, thanks to Constantine, is one. Sentence after sentence—and Babel's sentences are some of the most dynamically potent in literature—gleams in its rented English."

UNSETTLED BY SUCH VIOLENT aesthetic teeters around a pivotal original, what judicious, stabilizing force could we hope to find? Some critics propose a modest solution. Although they don't go so far as to suggest whether a liberal or a literal approach to translation would more appropriately suit a given writer, they do suppose that an ideal translator is waiting in the wings of past and present history to turn our authorial ashes back to flesh. Why not, their logic runs, dependably draft a Great Writer to take over where the bungling translator is bound to drop the ball? "How one pines," wrote one critic grieving over Davis's version of *Swann's Way*, "for a translation of Proust by the hand of Nabokov." And yet one cannot help but ask: which hand? The liberal left, with which young Nabokov rendered his rhythmic and rhyming translations? Or the literal right, with which he later pinned down wriggling languages with entomological precision?

Naturally, there are less conflicted examples of the "great writer to the rescue" strategy. An elegant translation of Milton was done into French by Chateaubriand. So too a musical Poe, from the desk of Baudelaire. A Homer of great verve echoes in the Southsea English of Christopher Logue. Strindberg's Swedish *Huckleberry Finn* is said to have no equal, except perhaps in Boris Pasternak's rendering of Shakespeare. And then of course we always have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richard Howard's Baudelaire,
Dear Ezra's Cavalcanti;
Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*
Gabriel Rosetti's Dante

—but trying to add another stanza tests more than my capacity for rhyme. It isn't that we aren't grateful when we happen upon translations by sanctioned hands; rather, that there are so few sanctions to hand around. So what's an eager reader to do? What recourse does a reader have if, as Francine Prose assures us, "the ideal is not to translate from one language into another but rather from one writer into another"?

Alas, in the name of such ideals, many virtuous hearts have met their end. Two millennia earlier, say, idealism guided the Roman clergy to send Jerome on his way (his Vulgate on the brink of becoming the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for more than fifteen hundred years). And later, idealism drove the Anglicans to unearth and burn Wycliffe's bones. Soon thereafter, idealism guaranteed Tyndale's last, strangled breaths. For none of these virtuous translators was deemed ideal in his day—which is to say, faithful enough in the judgments of his critics.

And yet, if these men of faith, hard at work upon the classic text to end all classic texts (and with true hell to pay if they should fail), were deemed to have fallen short, what hope is there for the low-rent translator of literature? How could such a person—devoid of any kind of genius—manage something not rudely stamped, not sent before our eyes scarce half made up? How could poor Helen Tracy Lowe Porter, a druggist's daughter from Towanda, Pennsylvania, handle such hot lights? Sure, she singlehandedly imported all of Thomas Mann, but her lasting reward is to be filed under Nabokov's rubric for her caste—"laborious ladies" (and to be called "Mr. Porter" in *The New York Times*). And what about those Muirs and their Kafka, who we all know (by now) is much funnier and far less religious than they made him? And please don't ruin everyone's day by mentioning contumacious Constance Garnett, who had the temerity to render all of Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky, and Gogol, and Lermontov, and Chekhov—which is to say invented the idea of Russia for a century of Western readers. Because, yes, while all of these writers would not exist to us without these translators, let us not forget that the prose of all these shoebuckle villains was second-rate. Their methods? Crude. Their focus? Blurry. How could they give us a sense of these great writers' Great Styles?

Unless, of course, we consider something that Proust, that supreme stylist, said on the subject. In an interview in 1913, when the first volume of his novel was published, Proust told his interlocutor:

> Style has nothing to do with embellishment, as some people think; it's not even a matter of technique. Like the color sense in some painters, it's a quality of vision, the revelation of the particular universe that each of us sees and that no one else sees. The pleasure an artist offers us is to convey another universe to us.

It is rarely a risk to say that Proust was right; but Proust was right. The trouble with translations, the reason so many Gides and Goethes find them galling, is that they erase a writer's every careful choice, and replace a burnished surface with a second-rate surrogate—and still manage to reveal a universe. We hate translations because they succeed despite their failures, and in so doing they reveal our easy ignorance. For we have misunderstood the true nature of great literary style. Fetishizing surface, we have missed substance. For style is not the conspicuous effect—the easy alliteration, the calculated repetition, the deliberate echo. These pleasures—and they are no less enjoyable for being, ultimately, incidental—are merely pleasures of the flesh. And style, however much its appealing skin suggests it, is not flesh. Flesh can be destroyed by a single, critical parasite. But bone endures, no matter the nature of its burial. And style, it turns out, is bone.

I know this to be true. After having spent the better part of four months reading the new Viking/Penguin Proust, and the old Kilmartin/Enright Proust, and the erenow Moncrieff Proust, I will tell you there is no comparing them. No matter the local differences aplenty, the global movements of mind and the quality of vision are undeniably, uniformly there. Reading each from tip to toe, no matter which, one follows Proust's narrator as he makes his way, "descending to a greater depth within myself"—ourselves. That depth survives in translation, in all the translations, for—however subjective assertions of "goodness" surely are when assessing literary quality—greatness is calculable, irrefutable, inviolable: a great writer survives any translation. And yes, without question, some writers take longer to show their greatness, or to have their greatness fully shown: we still await a broader view of Pushkin; we as yet glimpse only a fraction of Mahfouz. And yet surely these writers, however diminished, survive our fatal shores. How? It is as Miles Smith said in his preface to the pilfered King James:

> Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water; even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well. ■

NEW!! EXCITING!!

JOIN With Others in a Fascinating Adventure

Discuss. . .

Rebuilding Human Society

Go To:
www.committeefor correspondence.net

C.L.Corey, Retired Professor
Published Author

Choose a Trustworthy, Reliable Web Host.
No Mandate Required.

Ensure your Web site stays up and running. Choose pair Networks as your Web host and domain name registrar.

Learn why over 150,000 sites from around the world call pair Networks home. Visit **www.pair.com.**

pair networks®

www.pair.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WASHINGTON DIARIST

The Wake

I REMEMBER THE DAY MANY YEARS ago when I discovered the indifference of nature. Early on a summer's morning on Shelter Island, a friend took me out on his fishing boat, and somewhere beyond Gardiner's Bay the motor died. We stalled in the despotic sun, relying on a little outboard appliance to point us in the direction of the distant harbor. Suddenly a squall came upon us, fierce rain and cruel wind. The boat pitched wildly on the water. We were helpless. I was introduced to terror. The most terrible imaginings were real. I believed that I might be lost. And at the blackest moment of my peril, a seagull landed alongside me and coldly stared. I will never forget the equanimity in that bird's eye. No, I did not expect the creature to be moved by my ordeal; but I had never before been regarded so inhumanly, never before imagined how I might appear exclusively from the standpoint of nature. It was sickening. This was the end of all understanding, of all care. My purposes were as nothing. My life and my death were motions of matter, neutral iterations of an elementary flux. I had read in various sages, ancient and modern, that such an intuition of detachment constitutes an experience of sublimity, but all I saw was savagery and stupidity. Soon the storm lifted, and the winged slave of instinct flew off, and a fishing boat came along and guided our crippled vessel into port. After we made land, fear was succeeded by contempt. I loathed nature. The natural world looked powerful but pitiful; gigantically oafish, vastly limited. Its "wisdom" was not what I could call wisdom. My sensation of physical vulnerability was dispelled by an arrogant delight, a reasoned gloating, in the fact that my being was not only physical. All the biology and the chemistry and the physics that formed me notwithstanding, I was a hole in nature. I was puny but I was human—materially inconsiderable, morally considerable; and I owed my allegiance to this arrangement. My solidarity belonged not with laws and processes, but with minds, hearts, souls. I promoted my alienation from the natural into the very mark of my worth. I would henceforth take the side of the human against the side of the natural: the oath of Shelter Island. The opposite course would be ontological treason.

ON THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER 1, 1755, an earthquake destroyed Lisbon. It lasted ten minutes, and concluded with a tsunami at the mouth of the Tagus River. Tens of thousands of people perished, and the philosophical confidence of Europe was forever shaken. When I began to grasp the magnitude of what the Asian ocean wreaked last week, it was to the Lisbon literature that I turned for assistance. I was in no mood to open a Bible. It is indecent to move immediately from catastrophe to theodicy. Evil should shock and disrupt. The humanity of the dead should be honored with the tribute of dissonance, the tribute of doubt. I do not see how a theistic view of the world cannot be embarrassed, or damaged, by such an event. If it is not possible to venerate nature for its goodness, then it is not possible to venerate the alleged author of nature for His goodness.

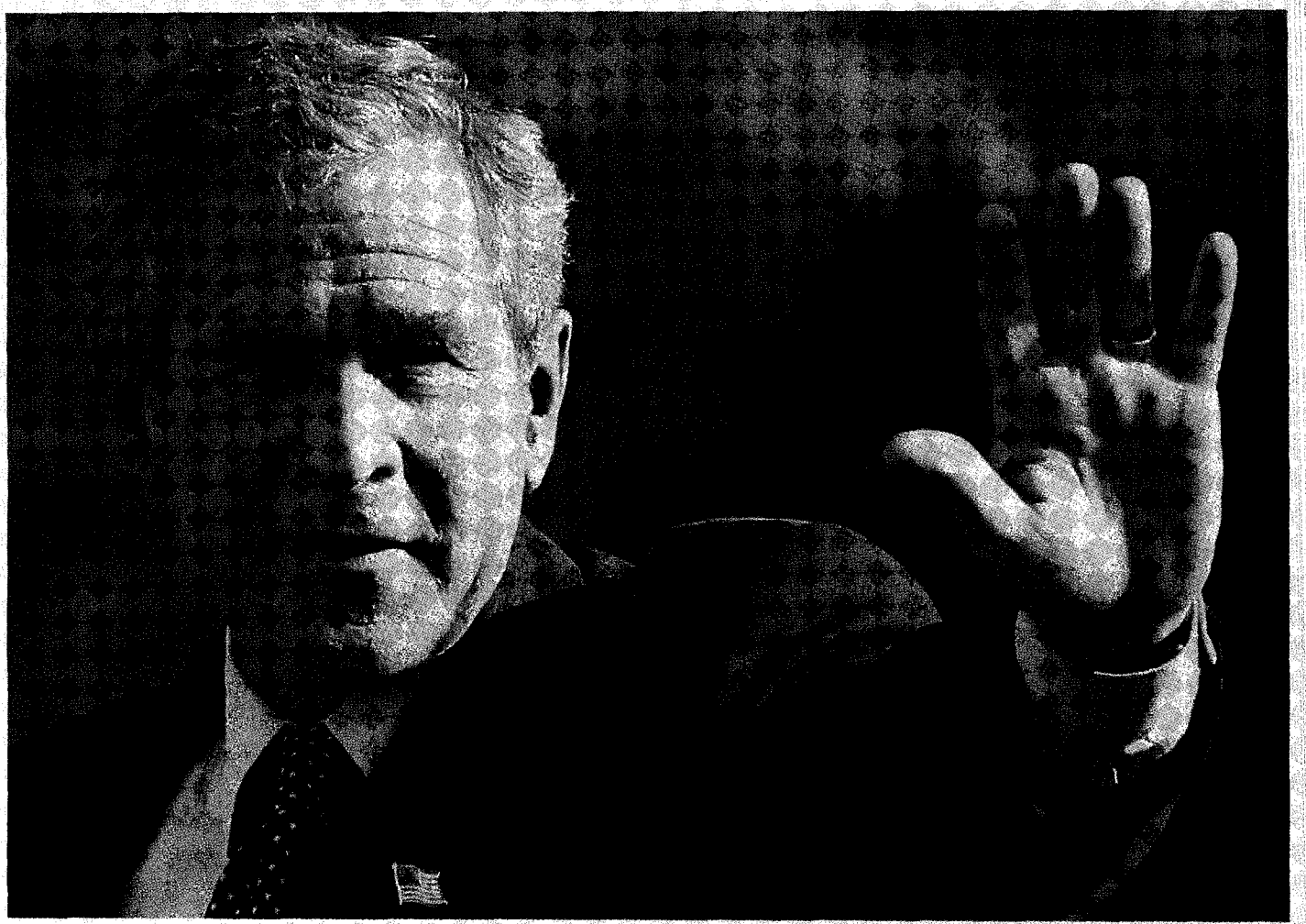
I UNDERSTAND THAT RELIGION LONG AGO learned how to argue its way around cosmic cruelty, but it is the absence of protest, the intellectual efficiency, that is so repugnant. Those who smugly intone that they have no explanation, that it is all a mystery, that the ways of the universe and its Creator exceed the capacities of the mind: they are over-ready for tragedy. They should more candidly admit that they choose not to reflect upon the spiritual implications of natural destruction, because they wish to protect what they believe. In the aftermath of such a disaster, religious people have more mental work to do than irreligious people, because they are the ones who teach the benevolent government of the world. Sometimes they teach much worse: the punitive explanation of suffering, the idea that this is not evil, it is justice. In the ruins of Lisbon, the "earthquake sermons" came in many varieties, but the most salient theme, to choose but one instance from a prominent Jesuit preacher, was this: "Learn, O Lisbon, that the destroyers of our houses, palaces, churches, and convents, the cause of the death of so many people and of the flames that devoured such vast treasures, are your abominable sins, and not comets, stars, vapors and exhalations, and similar natural phenomena." Such sentiments were heard from Muslim and Hindu clerics this week, and even the Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel instructed "this is an expression of God's great ire with the world." All this is nothing other than a justification of the murder of children.

IT WAS COMPLETELY RIGHT THAT THE horrors of Lisbon would throw Europe into a crisis of meaning, that Voltaire's denunciation of the faith that *tout est bien* would send seismic waves across an entire culture. In our *tout est bien* society, with its jolly religiosity and its cathedrals of optimism, I see prodigious American generosity (and prodigious talk about American generosity: finally our subject is always ourselves), but I do not see much serious reflection, at least publicly. The relief efforts in Asia may turn out to be one of American practicality's finest hours, but why are Americans so afraid of philosophy? We are not alone, of course, in our satisfaction with our condition. Rousseau responded to Voltaire's poem about Lisbon with an extraordinary letter in which he asked his wrathful elder to desist from "troubling peaceful souls" and disturbing the "sweet feeling of existence." In arguing for the acceptance of what transpired in Lisbon, Rousseau relinquished the side of the human: "The system of this universe which produces, conserves, and perpetuates all the thinking and feeling beings ought to be dearer to [God] than a single one of these beings; he can, therefore, despite all his goodness, or rather through his very goodness, sacrifice something of the happiness of individuals to the conservation of the whole." It is an old idea, this logical quietism. It is not exactly false, and it comes in secular versions, too. Rousseau was correct, certainly, about the impertinence in the conviction that man is the center of the universe. But the problem of human presumption aside, it is difficult to see how the moral sense can survive in a mind that does not genuinely recoil from the killing of innocents. We are the parts before we are the whole. The universe does not owe us sympathy, but we owe each other sympathy. When I see the images of the anguish on the other side of the world, the only knowledge that seems to matter is what Voltaire knew: *le mal est sur la terre*, evil is on the Earth.

LEON WIESELTIER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOW WHAT?



THE NEW REPUBLIC

America's leading journal of opinion.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

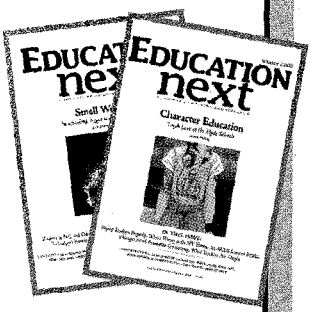
Visit www.tnr.com/subscribe
or call 1-800-827-1289

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cutting-Edge Commentary on K–12 Education

EDUCATION NEXT

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH



SUBSCRIBE
Receive four quarterly issues at the rate of $20.

FREE ISSUE
Receive a complimentary issue of the latest Education Next without obligation.

Call 800.935.2882 or visit www.educationnext.org

In the Winter 2005 Issue of *Education Next*...

A Forum on Paying Teachers Properly

For more than a century, public education has worked with a single salary schedule that compensates teachers for college credits, education degrees, and years of experience—but not for their effectiveness in the classroom.

Research shows that the degrees, courses, and experience that teachers have, beyond the first few years of teaching, are unrelated to how much their students achieve. The uniform salary schedule does not take into account that teachers work in schools offering different levels of nonmonetary benefits, such as a safe environment and students with different levels of preparation and home support. Nor does it allow for extra pay for those in hard-to-staff fields, such as math and science. But any pay-for-performance plan in K–12 education will succeed only if teachers buy into it from the start, if it is fair, and if it is embedded in a systemic reform that encourages teachers to become better at their craft.

—Lewis Solmon

The Moral Imperative

Are schools effective that take character education reform seriously?

Character education has legs. It is a reform so thoroughly in the American grain, not to mention so various and adaptable, that it cannot be dismissed as just another shiny and insubstantial bubble. Moreover, the wish for schools to somehow address the sense of drift and anomie in the larger culture is not likely to abate. So the issue is not whether we will have character education, but instead, what kind we will have and what relationship it will bear to the ongoing campaign to improve children's academic skills.

—James Traub

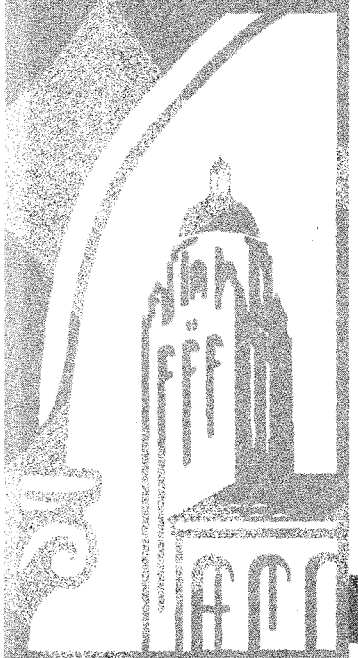
Where Have All the Dollars Gone?

Reading, Pennsylvania, became the first school district in the nation to sue a state education department over the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Reading's lawsuit might just prove that NCLB is doing exactly what it is supposed to be doing: exposing struggling districts to standards of excellence that they had never even imagined. And what was first considered to be the perfect district to illuminate NCLB's defects has turned out to be a shining example of why NCLB is needed.

—Brad Bumsted

To read more, call 800.935.2882 for a free copy of the latest *Education Next*.



Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

HOOVER INSTITUTION

. . . ideas defining a free society

Hoover Institution Stanford University Stanford, CA 94305-6010 Tel: 877.466.8374 Fax: 650.723.1687 info@hoover.stanford.edu www.hoover.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED